The World of Christian Worldview

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About the Authors

Introduction

MarketFaith Ministries did not begin as the full-fledged equipping ministry that it has become. It started out as simply an information repository on a website. Over the last couple of generations a transformation has taken place in American culture which is nothing less than breathtaking – and not in a good way.

When we were growing up, American culture was dominated primarily by a Christian worldview foundation. This does not mean that everyone was a Christian, or that the population at large lived by the tenets of the Christian faith. However, the values and ideals which informed what people considered to be "right and wrong" were based on Christian beliefs.

Fast forward to today. In modern American culture, Christian beliefs are still present, but they do not dominate society as they once did. Now, Naturalism dominates all of the major institutions of the culture – education, entertainment, politics, and news media. In addition to that, immigration has injected a large number of people who believe in some form of Animism or Far Eastern Thought beliefs. The pluralism in society today has totally swamped the Christian

Theism of the past. Christians have been slow to recognize the dynamics at play in the culture and even slower to address them.

To address this issue and help Christians thrive in this changed cultural setting, a new approach to personal discipleship education has become necessary. Now, skills which used to be most needed by overseas missionaries must become the default for every Christian. We now live in a country where other belief systems dominate and we need to be able to understand the tenets the other worldview possibilities if we want to have any hope of effectively interacting and sharing Christ with people who follow them.

The writings which make us this book are the compilation of several years' worth of articles that we have written in order to explain the concept of worldview and its practical implications for Christians. They have been put together in such a way as to give Christians the kind of knowledge needed to understand the world we live in and provide the tools necessary to be effective as believers in a world which doesn't really understand our Christian heritage. It is our hope and prayer that you will find this book to be a treasure for your personal Christian walk.

Part 1 Understanding Worldview

1. Why Worldview? By Freddy Davis

It is not unusual that when I bring up the topic of worldview, people's eyes start getting glassy and they begin to fade into some nether world. On the other hand, I see that when people really begin to grasp the implications of worldview training, they become very excited.

But here is the problem. While this does not have to be all that complicated, it also can't be explained in sound bites. It takes a little bit of explanation.

Unfortunately, even the word itself sounds a bit abstract and academic. So, I often have to call it something else or sneak it into the discussion while people are unsuspecting. But once they do begin to grasp it, the reaction is entirely different. It is immanently practical – even exciting – to begin mastering tools which make one's Christian faith more real and exciting. And that's exactly what an understanding of worldview brings to the table.

Hopefully you already know the definition of worldview. It is the assumptions that people make about the nature of reality. Gee, that really does sound abstract and academic, doesn't it. But it actually is not. We are talking, here, about the most fundamental understanding that we have about life. And while we can talk about it in academic terms, the implications touch you at the very deepest core of your identity.

Understanding the Definition

First, let's break down the definition. We will start with the concept of an assumption.

What is an assumption, anyway? Simply put, it is something that we take so for granted that we don't even question its validity. You have beliefs that are so fundamental to the way you understand the world that you cannot imagine that things could possibly exist in a different way. For instance, if you are a Christian, you may not even be able to imagine that there are people who really don't believe in God. Oh sure, there are people who say they are atheists, but we all know that when their backs get pushed against the wall they will certainly call out to God for help, right?

If so, that person is probably not really an atheist at a worldview level. Those are generally people who want to live life without having to be accountable to God, so outwardly they deny him. But in their inner core, they at least believe he exists. Otherwise they would not call out to him in times of need. This kind of person may be a functional atheist, but is not an atheist based on his core worldview.

A true atheist would never call out to God because they positively believe that he does not exist – to the same degree you believe he does. As a Christian, when you have a grave need, you automatically call out to God because you believe he exists, even if you are not in proper fellowship with him. But a true atheist believes God does not exist and it would not even occur to him or her to call out to him – even when the need is great.

It is hard for many Christians to believe that anyone could really believe that way. But there are literally millions of people who fall into that camp. By the same token, there are people who believe in some Animistic set of gods or in the impersonal life force – to the same degree that you believe in the God of the Bible. Their belief is so foundational to their understanding of how the world really exists that they cannot imagine that it could be any other way. That is what we are talking about as we deal with the idea of an assumption.

To grasp the other part of the definition, we have to understand what we mean by "the nature of reality." All we are talking about here is the way the universe exists. For instance, is there a god or is there not? If there is, what is he like. If there is not, what is the origin of the universe and how is it constructed?

Worldview is Practical

While an understanding of worldview may not seem practical on the surface, it is actually has very concrete implications. Let's take a look at just how practical this is for living the Christian life.

Relationship with God

The first aspect of practicality has to do with the Christian's personal relationship with God. All true Christians acknowledge the existence of a personal God that can be known in a personal relationship. There is a common problem, however. While most Christians acknowledge this fact intellectually, it doesn't always play out practically in everyday life. The reason this is so generally has to do with the fact that most Christians conceive of their relationship with God in emotional rather than objective terms. That is, when they *feel* God's presence they think he is near and when they don't *feel* his presence, they think he is not near.

This is a totally flawed understanding of our relationship with God. This doesn't even work in human relationships.

There are many things that can affect our feelings – what we ate, words someone said to us, how our ball team is doing, the weather and even the phase of the moon. None of these things have any effect whatsoever on the fact of our relationship with God. Of course, when we live a

disobedient life, we usually do, and ought to, feel bad. But it is not the feelings that are at issue. It is our actual fellowship with God.

The truth is, our relationship with God is an objective personal relationship with an actual objective person. The elements of that relationship include exactly the same dynamics as our relationships with human beings. The actual truth of the relationship is not dependent on how we feel at any given moment, but on how we operate within it. We can feel bad and the relationship be good. In the same way, we can feel good and the relationship be bad. It is wonderful to have good feelings, but that is not the criteria for evaluating the reality of a relationship.

An understanding of the Christian worldview helps us grasp the actual nature of our objective personal relationship with a real personal God. In addition, it gives us a foundation for living in that relationship. There is nothing more practical for the Christian than for our relationship with God to be profound and powerful.

Witness

The second practical element of an understanding of worldview relates to our witness for Christ. Again, most true Christians affirm that a they ought to be sharing the gospel of Christ with those who don't know him. This belief comes from the understanding that those who don't know Christ are destined to eternal separation from God and that Christ has actually commissioned us to share the gospel. So, why is it that so few Christians actually do it. Beyond that, why is it that so few even know how?

While intellectually most will acknowledge that actively being a witness is the right thing, somehow we tend to be able to justify why we don't really have to do it. As a result, most Christians don't. So, what creates the disconnect with what we know we ought to do and with what we actually do?

The answer, once again, lies in our worldview foundation. Without exception, a person lives out what he or she believes on a worldview level. If a person is not an active witness, that means that the worldview foundation doesn't require it – regardless of what we affirm on an intellectual level. So, where does this lead us? It leads us to affirm that we need to understand worldview as a means of strengthening our witness.

What Is it That Makes an Understanding of Worldview So Practical?

The reason an understanding of worldview is so practical is that it deals only with the essentials. It doesn't get into denominational or stylistic differences between Christian groups. It only deals with the core elements of what makes a person a Christian and the implications of living the Christian life.

The doctrines of the faith and the stylistic approaches we use to live out our faith and to worship corporately are certainly important matters. In fact, these are things that sometimes create separation, even among true believers. Sometimes, churches, and even denominations, split over these.

But there are some doctrines that are not essential for salvation and a person can actually get them wrong and still be a Christian. That being said, there are some which are essential and can't be compromised. It is these areas that are most crucial and which worldview training focuses on. As such, worldview training becomes one of the most practical things that we, as Christians, need to address.

As you move forward in your Christian faith, it is these essentials that you need to focus on. An understanding of worldview will give you the foundation you need to take your faith to ever

higher levels. Even though it may not be one of the traditional topics that Christians have focused on in the past, it is something that we need to center on in modern society. Do it, and you will find your Christian faith growing more powerful as the days go on.

2. What is a Worldview? By Freddy Davis

Recently I had an interesting interaction with a person who is involved in trying to start a new religion. It has been an fascinating process in many ways, but there has been one element that has been rather frustrating for me. When I shared with him the Christian understanding of God's grace, he simply could not bring himself to imagine that God would operate that way.

It is not that he is incapable of understanding it. In fact, I spelled it out to him several times in very basic terms, and he has repeated it back to me. But his repetition of my words didn't seem to sink down to his core understanding.

His mental conception of God simply won't allow for the concept of grace. In his theology, when a person dies, each individual is judged by God for all his wrongdoing. With that judgment, a person is sentenced to spend an appropriate amount of time in hell to pay for the sins he committed on earth. Following that sentence, the person then goes to heaven to spend some time there based on the good he did on earth. Finally, each person is reincarnated on another world and repeats the process. The very idea that God would not punish every sin and reward every good deed simply does not register with him.

So every time he tried to summarize my Christian faith he got mixed up. He couldn't seem to help but filter my beliefs through his own understanding of what God is like. The result, every time, was a total misrepresentation of my beliefs.

Now if this was not so serious it would be comical. And the really strange thing is, he doesn't seem to be able to understand what his problem is. His view of God is so pervasive in his mind that he even kept telling me that I believed things that I told him I didn't believe. And even when I corrected him, he would come back and tell me I was wrong, and that I didn't believe what I told him I believed. His understanding of the way reality is structured is so strong in his mind, that he cannot imagine that it could exist another way. When confronted with another way of thinking, it simply goes right over his head.

This example illustrates the pervasive nature of worldview. Essentially, it is the way an individual understands the structure of reality. It is so fundamental to the way we view our lives that most don't even realize there are other possibilities, if they don't deliberately take the time to study it.

A Set of Glasses

Let me give an illustration of how this works. A worldview is like a pair of glasses. Typically when we look through glasses, we are not really interested in the properties of the glasses themselves. Rather we are interested in what we see through them.

But what if the glasses themselves had properties which created a distortion? At first thought, you might think that you would recognize the distortion and take it into account. But that is not necessarily true. Suppose you had worn a particular pair of glasses all your life which had a blue tint and had never seen the world without your tinted glasses. In that case everything would look normal to you. You would not even realize that the colors you were seeing were distorted. In

fact, you would believe that what you saw was normal and that everyone else saw colors the same way you did. Even as you talked with others about the colors you were looking at, you would both be using the same words and think that the two of you were seeing and talking about the same thing, but you wouldn't be. And as you talked, there would probably be times when things didn't quite seem right, but you couldn't imagine that the difference was real, so you just let it pass.

Worldview is your belief glasses. It is what you believe about God, the universe, mankind, life after death, knowledge, morality and human history. People with different belief systems from you actually have completely different ways of understanding these things. And when you talk to people with different beliefs, you can actually be using the same vocabulary yet have a completely different understanding of what you are talking about.

The Basic Worldviews

There are a number of ways to look at worldview, but as we break it down to its most foundational components, we can divide it into four unique ways of understanding reality. Each of these four are so different that they actually contradict one another. The four are Naturalism, Animism, Far Eastern Thought and Theism.

Naturalism is the belief that only material reality exists. There is no God or spiritual existence. The practical implication of Naturalism is that morality becomes strictly man made. Man, himself, is the only known being in the universe which is able to make moral distinctions and must decide for himself how to structure life. Naturalistic belief systems include existentialism, secular humanism, atheism, much of postmodernism and others.

Animism sees reality to have separate material and spiritual parts which interact in a symbiotic relationship. There are spiritual gods who manifest themselves in physical nature and are capable of causing good or evil to happen to humans. It is up to people in the physical world to perform the necessary rites and ceremonies to take care of the needs of the gods. Those who do right are treated well by the gods and those who falter find things going wrong. The practical implication of this worldview is that people tend to live completely "in the present" for the purpose of appeasing and manipulating the gods. Animistic religions include such belief systems as Shinto, Wicca, Voodoo and various other nature based religions.

Far Eastern Thought understands reality to be a totally impersonal cosmos which is moving toward unity. Though it is impersonal, everything is understood to be a part of everything else – god is everything and everything is god. All of material reality is seen to be an illusion, as the actual reality is the unity of all. The practical implication is a passivism which asserts that we can't objectively know anything so there is no need to get agitated about anything. Far Eastern systems include Hinduism, Buddhism, elements of New Age and others.

Theism is the belief that there is a God. This God may be either personal or impersonal. Theistic systems usually depend on some kind of revelation as their authority source, and the way things ought to be are prescribed by a written revelation or a prophet. The practical implication of Theism is that adherents should work to fulfill the morality specified by the authority. Theistic belief systems include such traditions as Christianity, Judaism and Islam along with many spin-offs such as Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormonism.

In Our Day

You, yourself, understand life by looking through the lens of one (or a combination) of these worldviews. If you do not understand the nature of worldview, you will end up doing what the

man in my illustration above did when you are confronted with a belief system that is outside of your own. You will try to understand it based on your own worldview core which will prevent you from being able to come to a complete understanding.

It used to be that American culture was much more homogenous than it is now. Almost everyone saw reality through a Theistic set of glasses – more specifically, through a Judeo-Christian worldview. But that is no longer the case. There are many more worldviews represented now. On top of that, postmodernism has become very pervasive and even many of those who outwardly follow a particular worldview will assert, at the same time, that every view is just as valid as every other view.

In our day, if we are truly interested in fulfilling the commission that Christ gave us, it is essential to not only know our own beliefs, but to understand the worldview foundations of all beliefs. When we do, we will be able to share our faith with anybody. If we don't, we will become totally confused when we interact with those who have a different faith and our witness will fall short of its potential.

3. Approaches to Religious/Worldview Studies By Tal Davis

The field of religion/worldview is a broadly defined area of study. Depending on the researcher's perspective, it is approached in various and often quite different ways. It also depends heavily on the motives the researcher brings to his or her investigation of religious or worldview issues.

In this article we will explore six different ways scholars and researchers approach the study of religions and worldviews. Obviously some of them overlap and researchers may utilize the work of those from other approaches in making their evaluations.

Sociological

Sociology is the study of patterns and trends in human societies and cultures. Researchers in this field utilize a number of sources of data including surveys, censuses, business, statistics, and others. The main purpose of the sociologist of religion is to discover with as much objectivity as possible the religious and worldview perspectives and trends in any specific people group, culture, or country. Data and evaluations of it are usually published in journals and online. For example, one of the most informative websites of this sort is the CIA World Fact Book. It is located online at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook.

Psychological

Psychology is the study of human and animal behavior and how thinking processes operate. Psychologists explore these areas through a multitude of methods. Some researchers simply listen to and record the thoughts and beliefs of their subjects. Some use standardized test instruments to discover a persons' thought processes. Others may use experimental methods to test behavioral and learning tendencies in people and animals.

In the field of religion and worldview the psychologist may use the above methods to try and explain religious ideas and practices. Most psychology researchers (but not all) begin with the presupposition that religion/worldview is a product of psychological conditioning or biological

brain processes. Their goal is to discover what those factors are in order to correct behaviors and thoughts that are regarded as inappropriate by society or culture.

Phenomenological

Phenomenology, according to the Farlax Online Dictionary, is "the philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) that concentrates on the detailed description of conscious experience, without recourse to explanation, metaphysical assumptions, and traditional philosophical questions." In plainer words, the phenomenologist looks at religion and worldview as purely experiential occurrences in the physical life of a person. In this perspective all such experiences are regarded as having no real objective meaning except that which the individual may claim. In any case, no one experience is to be favored over any other as they are all seen as totally subjective. Thus the Christian experience of spiritual rebirth is seen as no more or less valid than, say, the mystical experience of a Hindu or Buddhist.

Historical

The historical approach applies historical methodologies to the study of these issues. The objective historian seeks to accumulate all the evidence and data he or she can to discover as close as possible to what really happened in past events. Historians, however, in the study of religion, often come to it with presupposed philosophical ideas about what could or could not have happened. For instance, many Bible historians presuppose that any miraculous or supernatural occurrences recorded in Scripture cannot possibly have happened in real history. Thus, they say, those events must be based on legends and myths or were embellished by the biblical authors. In some cases they may speculate about what happened by offering naturalistic alternatives. For example, one serious Bible skeptic has proposed that Jesus did not actually rise from the dead but was impersonated by his identical twin!

Of course, not all historians discount supernatural occurrences. In fact, many have applied historical principles to supernatural Bible events and concluded that there are no better explanations than that they happened as reported. The best example is what we mentioned above; the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even some non-Christian historians are hard put to explain the numerous circumstances surrounding that event outside of it being actually true.

Ecumenical/Inclusivism

Another way some researchers approach these issues is what is commonly called ecumenicalism or inclusivism. This approach simply assumes that all religions and worldviews are basically true and have equal validity. Those in this camp ignore the obvious philosophical and theological differences and stress what commonalities may exist. This approach usually considers any religion or worldview that may make exclusivist claims to be intolerant and bigoted. Many liberal Protestant denominations, unfortunately, have adopted this approach.

Evangelical Christian

The evangelical method is, to first, carefully analyze the philosophical bases, the historical underpinnings, the stated doctrinal beliefs, and the practices of all religions and worldviews. Then, each belief system is systematic compared to the essential historic Christian doctrines as defined by believers from Scripture since the New Testament era. These key doctrines include the nature of God (the Trinity), the nature (God-man) and work (death and resurrection) of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation by grace through faith in Him. Any movement whose historical

claims cannot be substantiated and whose beliefs fall outside of the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy must be rejected. This is the approach we take here at MarketFaith Ministries, as do most evangelical scholars. This analysis is done, not with malice, but with genuine love for those who do not follow the only true way of salvation in Jesus.

4. The Invisible Nature of Worldview

By Freddy Davis

Some time back the hard drive on my computer died. Fortunately, I had most of my important data backed up and was able to get it back when I got my new computer. My e-mail program, though, was not backed up. But I had a friend who took my hard drive and was able to recover the lost data. It took the recovery program literally 3 months to dig the data out, but I finally had it. By that time, I had a new computer and my e-mail program was back up and going. At that point, I thought it would be good to reinsert the old data so I went through all of the proper steps and put it in. Basically everything was fine when I did this, but there were a couple of anomalies – nothing major, but they were a bit annoying.

So I went to the tech support website to try and figure out how to solve the problem. There was a procedure to work through, so I did it. But it didn't solve my problem. The next step was to send an e-mail to the support folks. From that, an actual person e-mailed me back with some questions. We went back and forth several times so I could explain the problem, then he sent me a process for solving it. When I read his e-mail I was completely blown away.

I am sure that you have dealt with people before who are literally geniuses in their field, but are virtually incapable of explaining how to do something in a way that a lay person can understand. Well, that was this guy. I hardly understood anything he had written. And when I asked a simple question to clarify his explanation, what came back was an even more detailed explanation with dozens of contingencies. It took, literally, three weeks to finally get my problem worked out. After finishing the process and looking back at what I ended up doing, it all could have been handled in about two e-mails with the right explanation.

The truth is, I had no idea that the possibilities for dealing with that program were so vast. I only work with it on a surface level. And for me, surface level knowledge (or ignorance) is really quite sufficient for working with this program.

But, that cannot be said for every subject. There are some things where remaining ignorant is not an option. For Christians in our day, ignorance of worldview is one of those areas.

The fact is, you, and everyone else in the world, have a worldview. But unless you have studied the topic, you probably have no idea as to its nature. Worldview relates to the assumptions people make about the nature of reality. While this definition may initially sound daunting, it is really not that complicated. All we are talking about, here, is a particular set of beliefs that individuals hold.

But these are not just any ol' beliefs. This is a particular set of beliefs that underlie all of a person's other beliefs. These beliefs are so basic that most people are not even consciously aware of them, and certainly don't know *why* they have them. They are so basic that they generally fall into the category of assumptions that people hold.

These beliefs also relate to a particular topic – the nature of reality. Reality, in this case, is simply what is actually real. We get at reality by asking three basic questions: Does God exist or

not? What kind of creature is a human being? What is the ultimate meaning that a person can get out of life?

Recently I had an e-mail discussion with an Atheist. During this conversation, he kept insisting over and over that he did not adhere to any faith and thus he didn't have to account for faith beliefs like "religious" people do. He was not even aware that his understanding of reality is solidly planted on a faith foundation. He was totally convinced that his beliefs about reality were based on science. This is a perfect illustration of how fundamentally basic worldview beliefs are. They are so basic, it is hard to imagine that anyone could believe anything else. They are so basic, they are considered to be objective fact, even though they are beliefs.

For instance, this Atheist insisted that his belief that God does not exist is factually based. The truth is, there is no science which can demonstrate a belief like that. In fact, Atheism is built completely on faith. But Atheists don't generally see it. They tend to think that everything they believe is based on science.

This assumptive nature of worldview is true for Christians, as well. We do assert that our belief is built on faith, but our underlying assumption is that God exists and that he is the God described in the Bible. When people say they don't believe in God, many Christians can't fathom that they really hold that belief from their core. I don't know how many times I have heard Christians express the sentiment: Maybe they say they don't believe in God, but just watch when they get in trouble and see who they turn to. But if they are true Atheists, that is not the way they will respond. They believe God doesn't exist to the same degree Christians believe he does. And it is hard for them to imagine that Christians can believe the "superstition" of the Christian faith.

The truth is, we cannot get at worldview beliefs by scientific enquiry. A worldview is a set of beliefs. That doesn't mean, though, that people can just believe anything they want as if there is no such thing as objective reality. There is some actual way that reality is structured. We can live life as if it is structured a different way, but it doesn't change the reality.

Also, we are not left without a means of getting at the truth. We have logic, empirical enquiry, human experience and revelation from God. If we look in the right place with an open mind, the truth about reality can be discerned. If we don't look in the right place we will still live life from beginning to end, we just won't ever be in sync with the way reality is actually structured.

For Christians in modern society, worldview is actually a very critical thing to understand. The fact is, we interact with many people who hold different worldview beliefs than we do. If we are serious about sharing a witness with them, we must know what they believe at this very basic level. Otherwise, we will not be able to share the gospel message in a way that makes any sense to them.

I want to challenge you now to make a commitment to make your worldview education a priority of your Christian training this year. If you do, you will find yourself in a position to be a more effective witness for Christ than you have ever been before.

5. The Seven Questions That Define a Worldview

By Freddy Davis

During my overseas missionary career, while I lived in Okinawa, I got into scuba diving. Okinawa has to be one of the best places in the world for that activity. In most places around the world, avid scuba divers have to travel significant distances and have access to a boat in order to have any kind of variety at all in their diving experiences. But not in Okinawa. There were

numerous places all around the island which were suitable for diving. Almost all of those places could be accessed directly from shore, simply by swimming out a short distance.

On top of that, different parts of the island provided dramatically different diving experiences. Some places had many varieties of coral and tropical fish. Other places had underwater coral walls which dropped off straight down sixty to one hundred feet. There were places where there were giant underwater boulders and caverns, gradually sloping washtub hills and enchanting rock formations.

The sea life there was also fascinating. Besides the colorful fish and coral, there were snakes, eels, crabs, lobsters, urchins, sea cucumbers, starfish, many kinds of plants, clams and a good variety of other shelled creatures. A lot of the sea shells found in the waters around Okinawa were fairly common and not particularly interesting to collect. But there were some spiral shells and other small shells that were very colorful and ornate.

The ones of these that I found were mostly dead – the creatures that once inhabited them already gone. Occasionally, though, I would find one that was alive that I wanted to take home with me and prepare as a trophy. However, you had to be careful with these. Some of them have poisonous stingers that are retracted into the shell but are thrust out when they are threatened. It was necessary to be careful how you picked these up and also how you transported them.

Of course not all shell creatures were poisonous this way, but if I wanted to be sure I was safe, I had to learn what to look out for when handling the shells. There were certain spiral shapes in particular that were important clues.

Discovering Worldviews Around Us

As we seek to interact with people who have other worldviews, we also need to be careful. Some of these folks are very militant and are actually out to try to do harm to Christians. But that is actually not the case with most. More often than not, they don't, themselves, know anything about worldview and are just trying to get along in their own lives. In these cases, it is important for us to be careful as we interact with them so that we do not become a stumbling block. Regardless of the particular attitude of the individuals we engage in life, we need to be able to understand where they are coming from in their beliefs so that we can be the best witness possible.

So just how do we identify the basic beliefs of an individual at the worldview level? It is actually not nearly as difficult as it might appear on the surface. While the whole concept of worldview may seem a bit philosophical and esoteric, when you start getting down to specifics it is actually quite practical and reasonable.

There are several different approaches that various philosophers have identified to get at worldview. That being said, they all ultimately address the same issues. To me, the easiest and most comprehensive approach is the one used by Dr. James Sire in this book, The Universe Next Door. In this groundbreaking work, Dr. Sire proposes seven questions. By answering these seven questions, it becomes very easy to get at the worldview assumptions of any person of belief system. Below we will go through the seven questions and identify the kinds of answers that each worldview would give.

1. What is the Nature of Ultimate Reality?

This first worldview question relates to the very nature of reality in its entirety. The main focus of the issues it raises involve whether or not there is such a thing as the supernatural. If there is, what is it like. It deals with such questions as:

- -- Is there a God or not? If there is, what is that he like? If there is no God, what is the origin of material reality?
 - -- Are there multiple gods? If so, what are they like?
- -- Is there a personal element to ultimate reality? If not, what is the nature of impersonal reality?

2. What is the nature of material reality?

There have been those who have questioned whether or not the material world we live in really exists, and have posited that it is an illusion in one form or another. However, since it is the physical world that we live our lives in, most people assume that it actually does exist. That being said, not everyone agrees as to the nature of the material world. In fact, every worldview has a different perspective about it. Different worldview possibilities include:

- -- It is created or uncreated?
- -- It is orderly or chaotic?
- -- It is subjective or objective?
- -- It is personal or impersonal?
- -- It is eternal or temporal?

3. What is a human being?

The nature of worldview is such that it might seem strange to many people to even ask a question like this. We all have an underlying presupposition about what a human being is and we simply assume that everyone else understands it in the same way we do. That is simply not the case. Different worldviews hold entirely different understandings about it. And the reason it is important is because different understandings result in different ways of valuing and treating other people.

Some of the different possible answers posited by various worldviews concerning the nature of a human being include:

- -- A highly evolved biological machine.
- -- A god or potential god.
- -- A form of energy which shifts forms through successive existences.
- -- A person made in the image of God.

4. What happens to a person at death?

Every worldview has its doctrine related to the afterlife. While the practical implications of this may not, at first glance, seem to be that profound, those implications actually run very deep. For instance, if a person believes there is no after life, why is there any reason to refuse oneself anything in this life. Of if a person believes that they will get 72 virgins if they die as a martyr, why not go for it. Here are some of the answers that various worldviews give concerning life after death.

- -- People cease to exist.
- -- Individuals are transformed to a higher state.
- -- People reincarnate into another life on earth.
- -- People depart to a shadowy existence on "the other side."
- -- Individuals enter into the spiritual realm (heaven, hell, or other place) based on how life was lived on earth.
 - -- People enter directly into heaven.

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?

It is interesting to think that different people might actually have a different way of conceiving of human rationality. After all, we all have to use it even to discuss the topic of knowledge. In spite of that, the different worldviews actually do have different ways of understanding it – from considering it to be an illusion to thinking of it as an objective reality and places in between. These are some of the ways that various worldviews deal with the issue of knowledge.

- -- Consciousness and rationality developed through a long process of evolution.
- -- There is no "reason" that human beings are able to have knowledge. That is just the nature of our existence.
 - -- Knowledge is an illusion.
 - -- Humans are made in the image of God who, himself, has knowledge.

6. How do we know what is right and wrong?

As we look around the world at the differences in various cultures, one of the things that jumps out quickly is that there are certain moral principles that are almost universal. Questions related to honesty and integrity, sexual issues, how we should treat other people and so on are integral parts of virtually every society. Even when individuals or societies don't seem to follow the principles, they will still tell you that they exist. The search to identify what is right and wrong and to give reasons for why morality should be dealt with certain ways is an integral part of every worldview. Here are some of the ways that various worldviews deal with this issue.

- -- Right and wrong are strictly products of human choice.
- -- Right and wrong are determined by what feels good.
- -- A sense of right and wrong was an evolutionary development as a survival mechanism for the species.
 - -- Right and wrong are learned by experience as we learn what pleases the gods.
- -- We are made in the image of God whose character is good and who has revealed what is right.

7. What is the meaning of human history?

Some may wonder why the issue of time is included in the questions about worldview. Actually, the focus is more on the issue of meaning than it is on time. It is just that the meaning is set in the context of time. The search for meaning may be the most profound issue that human beings deal with in life. It is so profound that some people even choose to end their lives because they cannot manage to find a reason to continue on. Different worldviews have different ways of addressing this question. Some of the various worldviews deal with this by asserting:

- -- There is no innate meaning to human history. Meaning is what humans make it to be.
- -- Time is an illusion.
- -- Meaning involves realizing the purpose of the gods.
- -- Meaning results from discovering and fulfilling the purpose of God.

Using the Questions

It is important to understand the nature of these questions so that they can be useful in helping you more effectively interact with people who believe differently than you. First, you need to understand that typically you will not just sit down with someone and ask them the seven

questions. If you do have the opportunity to do that, there is certainly nothing wrong with that. But the questions are not ends in themselves. They are only tools of understanding. Getting the answers does not provide a witness.

But if you do know the Truth of Jesus Christ and why you believe it, it lets you know the kinds of issues you need to address with them in order to share a witness. Knowing the necessary starting point gives you the ability to form the kinds of relationships which will allow God to use you effectively in building his Kingdom.

6. What Is So Important about Understanding Worldview? By Freddy Davis

I have recently been having an e-mail debate with a college professor about the truth of evolution. It has been a very interesting conversation, and the back and forth has been somewhat wide ranging. In the process of this, he has been very tenacious in his defense of his position and his attacks on me.

To me, there have been some very interesting facets of this discussion. First of all, he is very adamant in his affirmation that he is a Christian. Secondly, he is just as adamant that Darwinistic evolution is the truth. And he pulls no punches with his assertions. He positively believes that life emerged from non-life and that more complex life forms evolved from less complex ones. He believes that the mechanism of natural selection works from top to bottom and that all life forms are connected on a continuum.

Now, if someone wants to believe this, that is their choice. But they must recognize that the basis for making this kind of assertion is squarely based on the worldview presuppositions of Naturalism. You can't get there with science alone.

That ought not to be a point of debate. There are no scientific findings which can prove his position. He can certainly make the argument that his Naturalistic approach makes the most sense to him and that based on that he has chosen to believe it. But he certainly can't say it is scientifically proven. But he does. He continues to insist that his beliefs are based on hard science and that there is no question about it.

And I mentioned that he insists that he is a Christian. He does believe that God is the creator, but he can't seem to express who God is, what he created or how he knows any information about God. He discounts that the Bible is God's direct revelation.

Now, this is a highly educated man, yet his understanding of reality is totally confused. He claims to be a Christian yet is a functional Naturalist. And he is fighting hard for his point of view. But in making his arguments he has to either distort or ignore what I say. He can certainly live his life carrying this kind of confusion, but to do so he has to distort his understanding of reality and it definitely affects how he lives life.

Why is it important to understand worldview? There are several reasons. The story above illustrates a couple of them. First, it gives one confidence to stand strong in the face of opposing points of view. Secondly, it provides a means of witness to those who need to know Christ. I have had a chance to share some of the gospel message in our discussion. But there are other reasons, as well, why understanding worldview is important. Let's dig a little deeper into this topic and see if we can more fully answer the question.

Worldview and God

First of all, worldview relates to the *purposes* of God. God created the world for a specific purpose – as a place for mankind to exist. He deliberately created a being he could have fellowship with and established earth as the habitation for man. As mankind has populated the earth, societies have been created, and as they have developed various cultural expressions have emerged. And what guides these expressions? The beliefs of the people in the society. Some societies have developed around values and principles from the Bible, while others have coalesced around contrary values and principles. In every society there will be some cultural expression which becomes prominent. And the expression that predominates will influence people for or against God. There are many people who are promoting purposes which are contrary to God's. Thus, it is important for those of us with a Christian worldview to fight for the hearts and minds of people in order to build a society which accomplishes God's purposes.

But it is not just God's purposes that are in play. It also relates to how we respond to the *commands* of God. God specifically gave mankind the responsibility to subdue the earth and to have dominion over it. Based on the Christian worldview, Christians ought to be doing all they can to create a world which conforms to the will of God. There is no question that the real war in the culture is the struggle for hearts and minds. After all, this deals with the eternal destiny of individuals. That being said, we still cannot give up the world. It is one of the battlegrounds upon which the war is fought, and the winners of that war will influence people toward or away from God.

In Acts 17:16-19, we have the story of the apostle Paul as he interacted with the people in the city of Athens. Here is what we read.

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. NIV

What do we see here? Paul was not content just to sit around and let the world go as it would. Rather, he engaged every part of society that he could. He engaged the Jews in the synagogue, the general Animistic culture with their many God, and the philosophical elites. This was at least three distinctly different worldview groupings, and he dealt with each one according to their own starting places.

In addition to the two reasons mentioned above that worldview is important to understand, there are some others we can mention.

- 1. We must be able to understand our own belief foundation. A large number of Christians struggle with understanding why our beliefs are valid. Understanding worldview addresses this problem.
- 2. We must be able to understand the belief foundation of others. In everyday life we hear the assertions of humanists, secularists, naturalists, modernists, existentialists, post-modernists, newagers, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, animists, and others. If we don't understand them, we will never be in a position to witness to them. Understanding worldview addresses this problem.

- 3. We need to be able to deal with causes rather than symptoms. As we deal with the various issues in the culture war, it is much easier to see the particular culture war elements that we disagree with and work to eliminate "symptoms" rather than identifying causes. For instance, abortion is not a cause to eliminate as much as it is a symptom of a belief system which does not value life. If you only address the symptoms, they will quickly return when people's moods change. We must understand and deal with the causes of wrong behavior. Understanding worldview addresses this problem
- 4. We need to grasp the objective truth about the nature of reality. There is a worldview that reflects the way reality really exists and it is what is taught in the Bible. The world actually does operate in a certain way and we can only experience the fullness of life when we are in sync with it. Understanding worldview addresses this problem.
- 5. Finally, we need a personal reality that can motivate us. Most Christians recognize that other beliefs are different from their own, but are not fully committed to what we claim as truth. Having a clear understanding of worldview issues will gives us compelling personal reasons to stand strong for our Christian faith as we learn to see the world through God's eyes, adopt his viewpoint and live our lives based on it.

When to Use Worldview Information

Understanding worldview is not just a matter of education. We certainly can become more educated by study in this area, but the practical implications in life are quite profound. There are several times when having this knowledge will make your life better.

When You Want To Get Your Own Life Sorted Out

Your worldview is the very foundation that your life is built upon. You do nothing and think nothing that is not first filtered through your worldview beliefs. If there are activities and attitudes in your life that you are not satisfied with because it seems to be contrary to the Christian faith, why do you accept them? It is because on a surface level you accept the Christian faith, but at a worldview level you allow for other possibilities. An understanding of worldview can help you discover where the problems are and give you the direction you need to solve them. You can use your worldview understanding as a means for planning your spiritual growth.

When You Want to Share Your Faith

One of the most important things you must be aware of when you want to share your faith is what the person you want to share with already believes. If they don't believe in God, you can't begin sharing by simply assuming they already do believe. If a person believes in God but that belief comes from a non-Biblical source, simply talking about God will not be fully understood because they will filter what you are saying through their own understanding of who God is. To be truly effective we must begin sharing at the most basic point of their understanding. An understanding of worldview puts you in a position to be more effective in sharing your faith.

When Someone Tries to Evangelize You

There are other belief systems in the world you live in which are very active evangelists for their religion. What do you do when one of these folks tries to evangelize you? Do you run? Do you refuse to open your door? Do you cut them off? Then, do you feel guilty that you were not able to share with them your own faith? With a solid understanding of worldview, you can know exactly where other people are coming from and not be frustrated or taken off guard.

When You Get Attacked

In our day, it is not at all unusual for people who have a non-Christian worldview to simply up and attack those who hold to faith in Christ. Many have been emboldened because Christians are so poor at knowing how to deal with these kinds of attacks. The fact is, everyone who attacks you is doing so based on their own faith position. They have no right to put down your position without first justifying their own. When you understand worldview, you have the tools to break down their attack and turn it on them.

Conclusion

On a surface level, the topic of worldview seems to many to belong primarily to the realm of academics. While is does make for a very interesting academic study, it is actually very, very real world, down to earth knowledge. It is particularly valuable for Christians who want to be able to stand strong in their own faith and to become effective in their witness.

Of course, gaining this foundation is not something that will happen without effort. It is a deep subject and does require an investment in time and energy. But in our modern world, it is an essential tool in the Christian's tool belt. Every effort we make to master our understanding of worldview is worth it.

7. Why Is Worldview Training Important for Christians?

By Freddy Davis

It is fair to say that the topic of worldview is not on the radar screen of most Christians – yet. The word has become more and more prominent over the last few years, so many people have at least heard the term. But even then, most have only the vaguest idea of what it is and why it is important.

Many Christians think of the idea of worldview in terms of other religions. That is, they believe it has something to do with understanding Islam or Hinduism or other religious beliefs. Certainly there is a connection there, but it is much more fundamental than that. The reason this is so is because an individual's worldview underpins his or her beliefs about religion, no matter what view is held. This is true for non-Christian religious systems, and even so called "secular" beliefs, as much as it is for our own Christian faith. So when we learn about worldview, we are probing at the most basic element of belief.

In many ways it is like the foundation of a house. The structure of the house is confined to and bound by the foundation. The superstructure is not constructed outside of the foundation. A worldview is the foundation of a belief system, and every system is confined to and bound by the worldview it is built upon.

Another way to illustrate the concept of worldview is to compare it to eyeglasses. When you look through the lens of a pair of glasses, what you see is altered by the lens. But you never think of the lens, only the things you are looking at through the lens. A worldview is a belief lens. The way we evaluate reality is determined by the beliefs we hold at a worldview level. But most people are totally unaware of the worldview lens – only the evaluation of life that they make based on their belief lens.

At this point you may be thinking; "Well, that is interesting, but what significance does that have for my Christian faith?" Great question and I'm glad you asked. That is because if you can

wrap your mind around the answer to this question and begin to seriously learn the basic principles of worldview, you will put yourself in a position to strengthen your faith life in ways you never imagined. You will also improve your ability to share a witness to virtually anyone you ever come in contact with – whether they have a Christian background or some other.

Strengthen Your Own Faith Life

The first area of your life that an understanding of worldview will help relates to your own faith. There are several areas related to your faith life that can be dramatically impacted by worldview knowledge.

Understand Your Personal Beliefs

The first area that can be strengthened relates to a deeper understanding of your own personal beliefs. You have a set of belief assumptions, an understanding of reality, that you assume is true without ever questioning them. In fact, everyone in the world operates from their own set of assumptions. But since different people hold beliefs that, literally, contradict one another, not everyone can be right. We must become aware of our own belief lens so we can make sure ours is correct.

It is an amazing fact, but immanently true, that most people are not consciously aware of all of the core worldview beliefs that they hold. A person's worldview operates at such a fundamental level that it is mostly unconscious. The only way to bring these beliefs to the surface is to deliberately study worldview. When you do this, your understanding of your personal beliefs puts you in a position to stand stronger in your faith life.

Understand the Christian Faith

Most Christians simply assume that their personal beliefs, and the beliefs of the Christian faith, are one and the same. But generally this is not the case. This is borne out by the fact that it is so easy for people who call themselves Christians to act in ways which run contrary to Biblical teachings and to justify those actions using non-biblical reasoning. For instance, it is not unusual to find people who claim to be Christians but believe in Naturalistic evolution or who justify having sex outside of marriage or believe it is okay to "fudge the truth" under certain circumstances. We could go on and on with the examples.

Truly understanding the Christian faith means not only having a knowledge of the tenets of the faith, but also making its teachings animate every thought and action that we engage. An understanding of worldview gives us a framework for understanding our Christian faith in a way that allows us to compare our actual beliefs with the Christian beliefs that we claim to hold.

Have Confidence in Your Own Faith

One of the main reasons Christians don't have confidence in their faith is purely based on a lack of knowledge. It is difficult to be confident in what you don't know. But Christian confidence goes a step further. As Christians, we want to have confidence in a manner which not only provides intellectual self-assurance, but which also becomes that actual motivating factor for our thoughts and actions. As hard as it is to swallow, we generally work the other way – we look to our own needs and ideas to shape our faith. If we truly want to be confident in our faith, we have to learn how to shape our personal beliefs around Biblical ones. When we truly grasp that concept, confidence in our Christian faith will shoot through the roof.

Have the Ability to Strengthen Fellow Believers

It is very difficult to be confident about giving right advice to other people when we are not confident about how we, ourselves, are living up to our faith. Thus, when we finally come to a place where we do have the confidence that we are aligned with our Christian faith, we put ourselves in a position to truly help other people. Not only does this give us satisfaction that we are able to serve others this way, but it also helps us fulfill a part of the mandate that Christ has given to us as Christians.

Strengthen Your Witness

The second area of life that an understanding of worldview strengthens relates to our witness. The unfortunate fact is, only a very small percentage of Christians actually share their faith with non-believers – even though we are aware that Christ has commissioned us to do it. When we truly grasp the concepts related to worldview, our ability to share our faith is strengthened considerably.

Understand Pop Culture

Every element of the culture around us is shaped by some set of worldview beliefs: music, movies, education philosophy, news media, political parties and on and on. There is literally no part of our modern culture which is not shaped by some set of beliefs. It is impossible to grasp the influences of these beliefs and respond in a Christian way without some understanding of the beliefs which confront us. An understanding of worldview gives us the tools to not only grasp where various cultural ideas come from, but also gives us a platform for intelligently confronting the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Understand Other People's Beliefs

In our modern world, the average person is libel to come into contact with people from literally dozens of different belief systems. Our culture has become very diverse belief wise. If we take seriously our commission to share the gospel, we definitely want to be able to share with any person any time it is appropriate to do so. But to do that, we need to have some knowledge of what they believe. Using a traditional approach means learning the doctrines of all of these various beliefs, which can be quite a daunting task. But if we understand worldview principles, the task is greatly simplified and provides us a way to easily be a witness to anyone at any time.

Have the Ability to Witness

We don't have to understand all about worldview in order to share a witness. However, understanding worldview principles gives us a set of categories which helps us identify more effectively with the people we want to witness to.

The reason this is so helpful is that there is a common set of categories which define salvation in every belief system – our own as well as all others. By knowing these categories, we have a means of understanding how the gospel message compares with other beliefs. It also helps us more easily identify what we need to share with others in order to help them more fully understand the gospel. With this, our ability to share the gospel message is enhanced immeasurably.

Have the Ability to Stand Your Ground in Faith Conversations

One of the main reasons people don't like talking about faith issues with others is that they are afraid they will come up against questions and accusations that they aren't able to answer. So, what is the cure for that problem? Simply, knowing how to give an answer. This is one of the places where a knowledge of worldview principles truly comes to the forefront. With this knowledge, not only do we have a greater understanding of the strengths of our own faith, but also the weaknesses of other beliefs. With that knowledge, we are in a position to stand strong with anyone in the face of questions or attacks.

How Can All of this Be Yours?

With all of the benefits of understanding the principles of worldview, what is keeping Christians from getting this knowledge? For the most part, it is nothing more than a lack of effort.

It is a fact, in any and every area of life, that you become good at what you do. If you put effort into something, you will get a result from it. And the more effort you put into it, the better the result. If, indeed, the purpose of God in our lives is truly the most important thing that exists for us, why are we so negligent in going after the knowledge and skills associated with fulfilling it? It is oh so easy to get wrapped up in self and set aside the purposes of God. But if we are serious about accomplishing the purpose of our existence, we will begin to put more effort into that arena.

It is certainly true that we are saved by faith through God's grace, and there is no work we can do to accomplish that salvation. However, this does not mean that we are to do no work for the kingdom. We are saved for the purpose of serving God. And we become better at serving God as we gain the knowledge and skills associated with accomplishing that purpose in our lives.

Every believer is called to serve and it requires preparation. To do that, we must put effort in learning several things. We must learn the basics of worldview. We must learn how to share the message of salvation. We must learn the skills associated with living in relationship with God. And to learn all of these things, we have to put out the effort to do it.

The secret to becoming more effective in our faith life is simply to decide to do it. We can become proficient at all of the matters dealt with here by reading, getting into discussions with people who have this knowledge, and participating in training opportunities. It is no more or less complicated than that. So, make your commitment today! Begin now to develop and implement your plan and jump on the worldview bandwagon. It will allow you to more effectively become the servant of God that he has called you to be.

8. Is There Such a Thing as Objective Truth?

By Freddy Davis

We live in a society which is dominated by relativistic beliefs. The ruling philosophy in modern culture assumes that there is no such thing as objective truth in an absolute sense. Most people believe that right and wrong are determined by life circumstances, not by a revealed pronouncement from God. And even many of those who say they believe in the Bible as objective truth tend to still live much of their lives as if it were not true. They have convinced themselves that God really doesn't care so much about how much they read their Bibles, how

much they give to his church, what aspects of church ministry they participate in, what habits they develop, how they treat people and the like.

When we acknowledge objective truth, we are recognizing an understanding of morality that must basically be seen as black and white. Certainly there are those things that are difficult to discern. But even that does not mean that a "right way" does not exist. There is a way God created things to be and it is our task in life to discern what that is and align our lives with it.

In many ways, this may seem like some kind of philosophical issue that doesn't hold significant meaning in real life. However, you do live your life "as if" there is some form of objective truth, even if you deny it in principle. As strange as it may seem, the assertion of relativity is, itself, an objective truth claim. Those who assert this belief are claiming absolutely that we cannot know anything absolutely. It is possible that what some people consider to be the truth really is not. And if they are wrong, they still get to live their lives from start to finish. It is just that much of the results of living in that manner will lead them down a path that skews life in ways which take away from a relationship with God.

No matter how people try to spin the life decisions they make, the law of non-contradiction is still in effect. Two contradictory things simply cannot both be true at the same time. God can exist or not exist, but he cannot both exist and not exist at the same time. As a being, God may be personal or impersonal, but he cannot be both personal and impersonal at the same time.

As we live our lives, we live as if God does or does not exist. Even if individuals are wrong about this, they still exist as mortal human beings on earth and live their lives. It is possible for a person to be wrong, and their wrong understanding will be reflected in the way they live their lives. But the way they choose to live does not affect the actual fact of whether or not God exists.

If a person does believe God exists, he lives as if God is either personal or impersonal. Again, this does not affect God's actual existence. But getting it wrong, does affect that person's relationship with him and the choices he makes as he lives life.

So, what happens when people live life based on falsity? Much depends, of course, on the specifics of the life choices. But let's consider a couple of areas. What if they live as if God does not exist, or even as if he is not personal? On a temporal level, they get a certain kind of personal freedom. They don't have to worry about sexual morality or moral choices related to addictive substances, lying, stealing, or personal relationships. After all, to them God does not exist – or at least not in a way in which he can personally interact with their lives. They become free, in their own minds, to make these choices based on their own personal desires.

But there is a down side. They also don't get to know God in a personal relationship. Additionally, they will create habits and addictions in their lives which will ultimately make life miserable, and their eternity will be one in which they are separated from God.

On the other hand, what happens with those who live life based on the objective truth revealed in the Bible – the way things really are? This kind of life does require a measure of self-discipline. For those not accustomed to living this way, it can be quite a struggle. But learning how to live a disciplined life based on the objective truth about reality puts one in a position to move forward in ways that are not possible otherwise. Having a vision and achieving goals to accomplish that vision requires the kind of discipline which only comes by having one's life correspond with the truth. With this kind of knowledge and discipline, we are able to engage God in a personal relationship which ensures abundant life in this world, and eternity in God's presence.

When we understand and acknowledge the fact of objective reality, we must still be very careful or we can easily get off track in our relationship with God. That is because, it is very easy

to become legalistic with this mindset. But the fact is, a relationship with God is not a legalistic experience – it is personal. The objective aspect of reality exists in a personal framework, not an impersonal one. When we truly grasp this concept and learn to live based on the objective truth revealed in the Bible, life begins to make sense in ways that is otherwise impossible.

9. How Do We Know Right and Wrong?

By Freddy Davis

Every generation and every society requires that we adapt morality to fit the times – don't you think? Well, that is the way that the large majority of people in the world operate. It is interesting that most evangelical Christians would tend to disagree with that statement in a generic sense, but then turn right around and live life as if it were true. We have a way of carving out exceptions for ourselves.

Stealing is wrong, unless we are a bit tight on our budget this month and need to steal a little bit from God to get by. Hatred is wrong, unless it is toward that person who is creating havoc in our lives at work. Cheating is wrong, unless it gets us that promotion to a place where we can help stop all of the cheating going on by others. Lying is wrong, unless it is just a small harmless lie. Living with someone outside of marriage is wrong, unless we really love the person we are with and plan one day to get married. Unless, unless, unless – the word we use to carve out exceptions for ourselves regarding morality.

Relativistic morality is such a prominent part of modern society that most people, even Christians, take it for granted that things must be that way. But Biblical teachings do not allow for relativism in morality. There is such a thing as right and wrong and Christians are admonished by God to do what is right.

One of the big problems we face in understanding this matter relates to how we understand morality in relation to God. Most people think of morality as a set of rules about what we can and cannot do. But God's moral requirements are not a list of rules. When communicating about morality we cannot help but express them as "do's and don'ts, but that is a knock on the nature of language, not on the nature of morality. We cannot help but express it that way.

But morality is not a list of rules. It is, rather, a description of the character of God. Things are right because they match up with his character. Things are wrong because they do not match up.

So, for a Christian, we do things or don't do things because we want to conform ourselves to the image of Christ, not because there is a rule. I want to be like Christ so I don't cheat, lie, steal and so on.

But to fully understand the concept of morality, we need to look at the four worldviews and see what all of the possibilities are regarding how we determine moral acceptability.

What are the possibilities for discerning right and wrong?

Each of the four worldviews has a primary foundation in one of four different possibilities for determining what is morally right. Each of them may have one or more secondary foundations, as well, but these are only used as a means for backing up the primary. The four possibilities are human reason, tradition, human experience, and revelation. For the sake of broad stroke understanding, human reason, tradition and human experience are all based on a relativistic understanding while revelation is based on a foundation of absolutes.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the belief that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality. As such, there is no God or other transcendent being in existence who can pass information to people in the material world. Since no information is available from a transcendent source, we have to get everything from our material world.

When it comes to morality, the only possible source is human reason. Human beings must discern for themselves what is right and wrong and build society based on their judgment. Basically, individuals, or groups, evaluate the societal situation and decide what they think is best. It is typically based on either personal desire or the desire to promote the survival of our species. When situations arise where people disagree regarding moral regulations, the one with the greatest power (whether physical or persuasive power) wins.

Animism

Animism is the belief system which asserts that ultimate reality is composed of both a physical and a spiritual reality which interact in a symbiotic relationship. What goes on in the physical world affects the spiritual world and vice versa.

Morality, in human existence, is determined by discerning what pleases the beings in the spiritual world. When a human does something that creates a disturbance in the spirit world, the spirits get upset and cause bad things to happen to the one(s) causing the disturbance. If things start going badly for particular humans, it is assumed that they have done something wrong (immoral) and they must correct the problem by appeasing the gods. Over the generations, the things which please the gods (things that are moral) are learned and passed on. Thus, morality is learned based on tradition (history).

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought is based on the belief that ultimate reality is an expression of an impersonal life force. Material reality is seen to be a spin-off of this ultimate reality and is far enough away that the impersonal life force is not able to be clearly discerned. As such, the material/personal world we live in is not a true expression of reality. What seems to be real (the material and personal) is actually a distortion of what is actually real (the immaterial and impersonal).

The parts of the life force which have been spun off of the main body are believed to be working their way back. This is done as pieces of the life force successively reincarnate to higher and higher life forms until they are finally able to escape the material world and rejoin the main body.

In Far Eastern Thought, morality is expressed in the karmic system. As each expression of the life force on earth lives its life rightly, it accumulates good karma. If it lives wrongly, it accumulates bad karma. Good karma propels the life force forward toward unity with the main body while bad karma inhibits progress. As human beings discern the causes of good karma, they are able to do the things which will help them advance. There is an element of tradition built into this system as information is passed on from generation to generation. But the main way of discerning morality is human experience. As humans experience life, they are supposedly able to discern the effects of the impersonal life force and live in such a way as to accumulate good karma.

Theism

Theism is the belief system which maintains that there is a transcendent God who has created the universe to operate a certain way. Morality is an expression of that creation. God has determined what is right and wrong and has passed that information on to mankind by means of a revelation. What God has revealed to be right is good and what he has revealed to be wrong is bad.

What is the Right Way to Understand Morality?

The subjectivity of Naturalism, Animism and Far Eastern Thought make it very difficult to take any one of them seriously as a means of determining morality. There is no way to arbitrate between conflicting reasoning and experiences, and no way to objectively validate various traditions. Reality does exist in some objective form, thus some objective basis for understanding morality based on that form must be found. This only leaves some Theistic belief system as the most reasonable way to get at morality.

There is a problem, though. There are many forms of Theism which are all clamoring to be seen as the truth. Of course, our Christian faith asserts that the form of Theism which expresses the truth about reality is taught in the Bible. (It is outside the scope of this article to give an apologetic concerning the truth of the Christian claim, but there is very powerful evidence to back it up, and there are numerous resources on the MarketFaith Ministries website which deal with this – www.marketfaith.org/resources).

As Christians, we understand that the God of the Bible is a real person and has revealed himself to us. In the Biblical understanding, morality is not simply the articulation of moral/legal codes that God has decreed, but is a revelation of his own character. Something is right because it corresponds with the character of God and is wrong because it doesn't correspond. When we understand morality this way, it is our desire to imitate the character of God that drives our moral sense rather than attempt to follow a set of rules.

10. The Last Word on Faith

By Freddy Davis

A lot of people try to make a distinction between what is based on faith and what is not based on faith – which is find if your distinctions are correct. But that is not always the case. For instance, I have had more than one very well educated person (even PhD level people) try to make the case that Naturalistic evolution is based on factual science while Christian beliefs are based on faith. In making their arguments, they bring up all kinds of explanations of data to make their point. This includes such things as arguments based on natural selection, DNA, fossil evidence, and the list goes on.

In making their assertions, however, they fail to make a distinction between the data and the interpretation of data. They interpret their data in ways which depend on Naturalistic presuppositions. Now, that is all well and good if the presuppositions are objectively true. But herein lies the problem. The presuppositions are not empirically provable. They are faith assumptions. If the assumptions are not true, then the interpretation of the data is also not true.

Many examples could be given of this problem, but I will mention just one to illustrate the point. Naturalists insist that the theory of evolution is true and base their confidence on the

concept of natural selection. Natural selection is the principle that living organisms are able to generate internal changes which allow them to adapt to their environment (within limits) in order to more easily survive. This is easily observable in nature, and farmers and ranchers even use this knowledge to create hybrid crops and animals. Christians and non-Christians alike can acknowledge this principle.

But the problem lies in the fact that this adaptation does have limits. There is a certain point beyond which the adaptation will not move any further. What Naturalists do, though, is assert that natural selection does not have any limits. Their belief is that natural selection is the principle that accounts for the existence of every species of plant and animal on earth. They believe that one kind of life form can evolve into another kind through natural selection.

The data that is scientifically provable is that natural selection does operate in the world. But Naturalists step beyond the science and make a faith pronouncement that evolution is capable of transforming old kinds into new kinds. There simply is no science to show that this is even possible. That is why the theory of evolution is still a theory. Data, itself, is truly a set of facts. But the interpretation of the data is always based on faith.

The truth is, in an ultimate sense (carried to a worldview level), every point of view is based on faith. There is no empirical way to answer the seven worldview questions.

So, now we get down to looking at "The Last Word on Faith." The question we are dealing with when talking about worldview is not: Is it faith? Rather, the question is: What is the nature of the faith?

In dealing with the nature of any particular faith position, the real bottom line question becomes: Is it true? Just because we must ultimately accept a faith position does not mean that it is not objectively true. There is some way that reality actually exists and there is some point of view that corresponds with reality. The fact that we have no empirical means to figure that out does not change the fact. All it means is that we must also use non-empirical evidence (logic and human experience) as we try to discover the Truth. All three lines of evidence must work together. This is not, by any means, meant to play down empirical evidence. If something is scientifically shown to be not true, that must certainly be a part of the evidence on display. It is just that empirical evidence alone will not give us the answer.

Many people try to make a separation between faith and fact. That is a false dichotomy. Facts will always align with truth, and getting at truth requires exploration based on faith (answers to the seven worldview questions). There is some faith position that correspond with all the facts. The real separation is between fact and fiction, not fact and faith. When we understand that difference, we put ourselves in a position to truly understand the nature of faith.

Part 2 Understanding the Christian Worldview

11. The Ultimate Foundation of the Christian Worldview By Freddy Davis

It is amazing to me how we, as human beings, are able to disconnect our brains in a way that allows us to ignore so much of the reality around us and live with internal contradictions. This happens at every level of our lives, from the mundane to the very important. Perhaps the mundane issues don't warrant the effort it would take to resolve them. But there are truly important areas of life that we ignore at our own peril.

Some of this happens simply because of a lack of knowledge in particular areas of life. We find that there are things we don't understand and simply choose to trust that our ignorance will not hurt us. This one is somewhat understandable, though some people use this as an excuse not to even try and learn what they don't know in order to keep from having to make any changes in their lives.

But other issues are ignored by deliberate choice. For example, one faith system may teach that some activity is wrong. If an individual wants to participate in that activity, they may adopt a different religion that approves of it so that they don't have to feel guilty about being disobedient – even though in their heart of hearts they don't believe it. People who do this tend to actually believe that there is no such thing as objective, absolute truth. Either that, or they are willing to live with the internal contradiction in order to satisfy their personal desires.

People do this all the time regarding honesty and integrity, sexual morality, personal industriousness and so on. In other words, we have a tendency to know what is right and wrong in most situations, but choose to do wrong and simply justify it in our minds as a means of getting what we want. This is a reflection of the relativistic thought patterns which are now part and parcel of the worldview which dominates modern society.

As Christians, if we want to be true to ourselves and to God, we have to come to a place where we are willing to look at what God has given to us in Scripture as the bottom line objective reality that it is. In order to do this, we have to grasp an entirely different worldview perspective – a Biblical one. The ultimate truth about the nature of reality has been propositionally shared with us by God in the Bible. God is an actual person who exists and has revealed himself. And the revelation he has given us is literally true in an objective sense.

In order to truly grasp this and make it apply to our lives, we must start with God's purpose. In every arena of life, purpose comes before everything else. Whatever purpose you begin with is the root of your every thought, attitude, belief and action. As you look at these things in your life you can begin to grasp a clue as to what your worldview really is. If there are places where it doesn't match up with Biblical teaching, this simply indicates that there are parts of your

worldview which are not truly Christian. Be that as it may, it all starts with purpose. Let's begin by looking at God's purpose for us.

On a generic level, God created mankind for a specific purpose – for fellowship with himself. Not that he needed to do this. God is certainly all sufficient within himself. But he wanted to be able to express his love even more. He set this up by creating man in his own image.

But a generic purpose does not get down to cases related to our personal lives. Ultimately, it is individual human beings with whom the relationship must take place. So, as we consider the purpose of our individual lives, we must recognize that it begins in the purpose of God himself. If we ever want to understand purpose for our lives, we must somehow come to an understanding of how we, individually, fit into God's purpose.

If God's purpose for creating mankind was for relationship with himself, we can deduce that our personal purpose for existing is found as we actually enter into and live in a relationship with him.

An interesting thing about this relationship, though; it must exist beyond duty and deeds. A purpose must always result in the fulfillment of that purpose. If that doesn't happen, it is meaningless. And God's purpose extends beyond external matters.

So, what does this mean as it relates to God's purpose in us individually? If God's purpose for our existence is relationship with himself, that must mean that we need to be living in fellowship with him. If we are not doing that, we are missing out on the most central point of our very existence. The profundity of the implications of this cannot be overstated.

Interestingly, this is not something that an outside person can clearly judge. It is quite possible to look like a Christian based on ones actions, but not be one. A person can go to church, pray, read their Bible, not swear, and do all kinds of good deeds and not be a Christian. It is also possible to be a Christian and live outside of the relationship, even while making a show of living in it by doing the deeds mentioned above. The determination of a relationship with God is something spiritual that cannot be seen from the outside. The true fulfillment of God's purpose in us is completely based on internal issues. Of course, a person who is fulfilling God's purpose will naturally do the things a Christian would be expected to do, but the deeds themselves are not proof of a relationship with God.

So, just what does the Christian worldview look like in a Christian's life? The bottom line is that it reflects the very character of God as revealed in the Bible. A person living in relationship with God will have the beliefs, attitudes and actions that God himself has which reflects his purpose. But there is more. A person with a Christian worldview is also actually living in the purpose by personally sharing continuous fellowship with God.

Purpose is the starting point of everything. This is why understanding and living in God's purpose is so critical for us as Christians. If we don't get this right, our reason for existence will never be accomplished. But if we do get this right, everything, and I do mean everything, will naturally fall into place.

12. Is the Christian Faith Really That Exclusive? By Freddy Davis

For some reason, Christians have been singled out by the non-Christian world as being bigots and narrow-minded zealots because of our belief that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ.

Certainly, they have not mischaracterized our belief about Christ. We really do believe that he provides the only road to salvation.

So does this mean that the criticism has validity? Actually, no! We would only be bigoted and narrow-minded if our claim was false and we were rubbing people's faces in it because we have something that they don't have access to.

First of all, there is every evidence that what we believe is actually true – Jesus was God in the flesh and his death on the cross and his resurrection actually did provide the means for the salvation of mankind. There has not been another person or event which has come along to take care of the sin problem which separates humanity from God.

Secondly, what legitimate Christian would ever rub people's faces in it. Our whole goal is to share the good news of salvation so that they can have it too, not to haughtily assert that we have something others don't have.

So, if we are not really bigoted and narrow-minded zealots, why would non-believers pin that label on us? Well, there is a very good reason why they do it. It is to protect their own very narrow understanding of salvation. Most people who would label Christians as narrow-minded don't really understand the argument they are making. If the Christian understanding is right, then they have to face up to the fact that their own beliefs are wrong – and who can simply let that slide? To protect themselves, they lash out at opposing viewpoints. And with this, we get at the very heart of an understanding of worldview.

The Nature of Worldview

Every worldview belief is, by its very nature, exclusive. In looking at a belief system – any belief system – there is a line which cannot be crossed. It is impossible for there to be a god and not be a god at the same time. If there is a god, it is impossible for him to be personal and impersonal at the same time. In the case of Jesus Christ, it is impossible for him to be the only way to salvation and to not be the only way to salvation at the same time. So, if someone believes that salvation is found by some other means, the Christian viewpoint becomes a target because of the assertion of some other narrow-minded viewpoint.

With this understanding in place, it seems a bit disingenuous for someone to assert that our Christian view is narrow-minded from the platform of a different narrow-minded point of view. But that is exactly what has happened when someone attacks our faith in that manner.

What Defines Exclusivity?

If some belief system is going to be called exclusive, we must understand what is meant by that before the charge makes any sense. The fact is, every belief system in existence (even those which pride themselves on being open and tolerant) has a line around it which defines the boundaries of the belief. As long as you stay within the boundaries you are a part of that system. When you move outside of that boundary, you have moved into something else. Because of our understanding of worldview, we actually have a way to get at that. There are three basic things which define the boundaries around a belief. These can be identified by asking three questions.

- 1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?
- 2. What is the nature of a human being?
- 3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

Every belief system answers these questions and the answers define the system's exclusivity. So, when someone claims that Christianity is narrow-minded, the claim is made based on the doctrine of some other narrow belief system. The person making the charge may believe that their belief is not exclusive but, by default, it has its own line around it.

How Is Christianity Exclusive?

As we mentioned before, Christians embrace the "exclusive" label. But it is not that we are exclusive in order to keep people out. In fact, we want as many people as possible to enter into our faith. But we do recognize that there is a particular way for people to enter the faith. So just how does the exclusiveness of Christianity play out? How does it answer the three questions above?

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?

For a Christian, ultimate reality is expressed as the God of the Bible. He is the creator and sustainer of the material universe. He is holy, righteous and just. For his own purposes, God created mankind for fellowship with himself. In eternity, human beings will either live in the presence of God or outside of his presence.

2. What is the nature of a human being?

Christians understand human beings to be persons created in the image of God, but who are tainted by sin because of the fall. This has caused individual humans to be separated from God because he cannot dwell in the presence of unholiness.

3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

Salvation then, for Christians, is the means by which the problem of separation from God is fixed. It was accomplished by the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. It is specifically applied to individual human beings as they acknowledge their sinfulness and invite Christ into their lives.

Now, certainly, that is specific enough to garner the label "exclusive." It is only through Christ that a person can enter into a relationship with God.

How Is a So Called "Non-exclusive" Belief Systems Exclusive?

There are many belief systems which point to Christianity and claim that we are exclusive, believing that they themselves are not. It is impossible to detail all of these, but one example will highlight how to analyze all of the rest. For this example, we will use Secular Humanism.

Secular Humanists really believe that they are open minded because they don't force people to believe a particular way about God (or even to believe in God at all). But is that really the case? Here is how Secular Humanists answer the three questions.

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Secular Humanism asserts that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality. Everything that exists is the result of natural evolutionary processes.

2. What is the nature of a human being?

Human beings, for Secular Humanists, are simply the naturally evolved animal creature which has developed the most complex brain. Humans are nothing more than highly evolved biological machines.

3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

For Secular Humanists, salvation is nothing more than personal self-fulfillment and the structuring of society in ways which insure the survival of the species. Since there is no transcendent existence to impose purpose or meaning on the material world, it is up to individuals and society to determine what constitutes personal self-fulfillment and how to best insure species survival.

Does this have a ring to it of open mindedness? Does the fact that there is no religious or revealed authority mean that Secular Humanists are more "tolerant" because they don't look to God for guidance?

Not really. In fact, they are very intolerant of anyone who does not answer the three questions the way they do. They are intolerant of any person who believes in God. They are intolerant of any person who views mankind as a purposefully created individual. And since, for them, salvation involves their own personal self-fulfillment, they are intolerant of anyone who stands in their way, no matter what arena of life this involves. By the same token, many of them don't have any qualms about walking on others or putting others down if it furthers their own personal advancement. The fact is, Secular Humanists have a very narrow-minded approach to belief and anyone who does not agree with them is considered to be ignorant and wrong.

Is it the Truth?

While we used Secular Humanism as an example, you can use the three questions to get at the narrow-mindedness of any belief system, no matter how "inclusive" they claim to be. But this is not even the real issue at hand. The real question is not, "Is it exclusive?", but "Is it the truth?"

There is some way that reality is actually organized. Either there is a God or there is not. If there is, he is either personal or impersonal. You can't have it both ways. So, someone is right and everyone else is wrong. Claims of tolerance and open-mindedness are totally meaningless if the claims don't correspond with the way reality is actually structured. Of course, there is no empirical evidence that one belief system or another does represent truth. Worldview beliefs cannot be addressed that way. But there are other kinds of very powerful and profound evidence for or against every belief.

The fact is, our Christian faith has more evidence to support it than any other belief system in existence. It is not narrow-minded to make a belief claim if what you are claiming actually does represent the truth.

For the Christian faith, the focus is not on the fact that Christ is the only way to God. While this is a true statement, the real issue is much more important. Human beings exist in a condition where we are separated from God. We desperately need a means of fixing that problem. God provided that fix through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather than being upset that there is only one way to God, we ought to be very grateful that God provided a way for us to escape the death trap of sin.

The exclusivity of Christianity is not oppressive - it is freeing. It is the message that there is a way for us to escape slavery from sin and eternal separation from God. Every belief system in

existence is exclusive and we have to come to grips with that fact. The important thing to discover is, which exclusive set of beliefs represents the truth? Once we know that, narrow-mindedness becomes a blessing, not a curse.

13. Is There Such a Thing as Non-essential Christian Beliefs?

By Freddy Davis

A lot of believers get quite agitated with other Christians who hold beliefs different from their own. In fact, there are some who get so bent out of shape that they are hardly even willing to share fellowship at all. But the truth is, there are many issues involved in dealing with differences within the Christian community.

There certainly is a line that cannot be crossed and one still be considered a Christian. There are those who call themselves Christians based on a host of different reasons, but whose beliefs are not truly Christian. When we interact with people whose beliefs are outside of true biblical faith, we are actually not dealing with Christians at all and should rather be focused on sharing with them the gospel. But there are also many differences within the Christian community which do not rise to that level.

The question is: How should we think about these non-essential differences? Beyond that, what can we do to enhance fellowship in spite of the differences?

The key to understanding this topic has to do with our understanding of the essentials of the Christian faith. We can draw a very clear line around our faith based on these essentials. Anything within this circle is legitimately Christian, and anything outside is not Christian. Let's first look at the line itself, then we can take a look at the differences we find inside the circle and consider how we should deal with them.

The Essentials

The essentials of a worldview, and by extension of particular belief systems, are determined by how it answers three questions: 1) Who is God? 2) What is a human being? and 3) What is salvation and how does one achieve it? At this point, we want to see specifically how our Christian faith answers these questions. For the purposes of making this easier to deal with, we will divide the third question into two parts and answer them separately.

1) Who is God?

God, in the Christian faith, is the deity who is described in the Bible. There are entire books written on this topic, so the treatment here is, necessarily, quite limited. However, we can legitimately identify four characteristics of the God of the Bible which distinctively characterize him.

- 1. God is a person (Genesis 1:26-27),
- 2. God is holy (Psalm 97:1-2),
- 3. God is just (Deuteronomy 10:17-18), and
- 4. God is love (John 3:16).

It is important to recognize that God is a person because only persons are able to have self-conscious relationships. God created us as persons allowing us to fellowship with him as a person.

God's holiness (moral perfection) is important because an understanding of this explains why sin is such a problem. Our sin prevents us from interacting with God because he will not fellowship with sin.

Knowing God as the just one is critical because this expresses the consequences to our rebellion against him. When we sin, God will pronounce judgment against it. Judgment has eternal consequences when a person dies without having his or her sin forgiven.

Finally, God's love is critical because it expresses how he cares enough for us to have provided a means of satisfying his justice. His love moved him to provide us a way to enter into a relationship with him. This love is a constant, but he doesn't force it upon us. We have to love him back and express it by inviting Christ into our lives.

2) What Is a Human Being?

There are two particular points which characterize a Christian understanding of human beings. These two points are:

- 1. We are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), and
- 2. We are fallen creatures (Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12).

The fact that we are made in the image of God does not mean human beings physically look like God. Rather, we are the same quality of being as is he. This element allows us to interact with him in a personal relationship.

Understanding that we are fallen creatures is also critical. This fallenness permeates our human nature and inclines us to rebel against God. It does not mechanically make us rebel, but it does incline us in that direction. We are still creatures possessing a free will who can choose to rebel or not. That being the case, we are responsible for any rebellion we express. This rebellion puts us outside of a relationship with God eternally, and creates the necessity for salvation.

3a) What Is Salvation?

Salvation, in the Christian faith, relates to how fallen humanity is able to have the sin problem taken care of so that it becomes possible to enter into a personal relationship with God. With the Fall, sin entered the world and mankind became separated from God. To solve this problem, he initiated a process of redemption.

It must first be recognized that human beings are incapable of solving the sin problem on their own. That would require the living of a sinless life, which is impossible. To get around this problem, God devised a plan where a sinless person could become a sacrifice and die in place of the guilty party. As no human is capable of becoming this sacrifice, God, himself, determined to become a human in order to fulfill this requirement. He came as the man Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life which qualified him to become the sacrifice, died on the cross as the sacrifice, then rose from the dead to demonstrate that he had the power and authority to overcome the sin problem.

3b) How Can We Achieve Salvation?

The substitutionary sacrifice of Christ makes it possible for individual human beings to receive God's salvation. But, just because this is possible does not mean it is applied automatically. A requirement must be met – though not a requirement based on human effort. It is based on the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9) and received through the application of our faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12). To receive this gift of eternal life, one must make a free-will decision to turn his or her life over to God and become his bond servant (Revelation 3:20). It is this act of

receiving Christ and turning our lives over to him which causes the salvation, which God has provided, to be applied individually.

The Non-Essentials

As stated before, a person cannot reject any one of the essentials and legitimately be considered a member of the faith. However, within every belief system, in addition to the essentials, there are non-essentials. These are beliefs and practices which do not affect whether or not a person is legitimately a member of the faith. This is not to say that the non-essentials are unimportant. In fact, many of the non-essentials are very important and disagreements based on them create great dispute and division. That being said, these issues are such that they do not rise to the level of excluding a person from the faith. In fact, a person can be dead wrong concerning a non-essential belief and still be a legitimate member of the faith group. This principle is true as it relates to every belief system in existence, including our own Christian faith.

Within our Christian faith, there are two categories of non-essentials which we need to examine. The first is personal preferences and the second relates to non-essential doctrines.

Personal Preferences

Personal preferences are matters which churches and individual Christians must grapple with, but which are not dealt with specifically in Scripture. While people may have a preference in how to deal with these, it doesn't really matter in the grand scheme of things.

One of these issues relates to the place a church may choose to worship. Some meet in giant, ornate auditoriums or cathedrals, while others meet in a storefront or in people's homes. The Bible doesn't say anything about where a church ought to meet and it is up to the members to decide for themselves.

Another issue relates to worship style. There are many possibilities and, again, the Bible doesn't give direction concerning this. It is entirely up to the church membership.

A third preference issue relates to the type of governmental structure a denomination or church uses. Once again, the Bible doesn't give direction here. A local church or denomination can decide for itself what approach to use without any fear of stepping outside of the Christian faith.

In many cases, the personal preferences of believers can be very strong – so strong, in fact, that they do not want to associate with those who choose a different preference. Who hasn't heard the stories of churches splitting because they couldn't agree on the color of the carpet or on the style of music used in the worship service. This kind of situation is certainly unfortunate, but it still has nothing to do with whether or not people who follow different preferences are Christians or not.

Non-Essential Doctrines

There is another category of non-essentials which is actually a bit more important than preferences. This category consists of actual biblical teachings which are not part of the essentials. Generally, the disagreements in this area have to do with different ways believers interpret what the Bible teaches about various topics.

As stated above, these teachings are very important but simply do not rise to the level of an essential of the faith. In the case of non-essential biblical teachings, it can be said that there is a right and wrong way to interpret these teachings. Something is objectively right. Sometimes,

however, the correct interpretation is not exactly obvious. The result is that different individuals and groups end up interpreting the meanings of these teachings differently.

The important point to recognize, though, is that one can be completely wrong in interpreting a non-essential belief and still be a Christian. This does not mean that a wrong interpretation is irrelevant. In fact, in some cases, a wrong interpretation can lead to very unfortunate consequences both in the life of a church or of individuals. As such, it is very important to try to interpret rightly. That being said, the ones interpreting wrongly are still brothers and sisters in Christ. There are a number of different areas where these non-essential doctrinal teachings can be seen. Some of the more common ones include:

- -- Which ordinances should be recognized and how they should be practiced?
- -- What is the meaning of the ordinances?
- -- Which is the correct approach to understanding the end times?
- -- How should speaking in tongues be properly understood?
- -- What is the proper understanding of the use of beverage alcohol?
- -- What day of the week is the proper one on which to worship?
- -- What is the proper understanding of predestination?

Final Thoughts

People get their take on non-essential beliefs and practices from different places. In some cases it is purely personal preference, as we saw above. But even when it comes to biblical teachings, the interpretation of these teachings often emerge from various sources. For some, it is a matter of sincere Bible study which leads to particular conclusions. For others it is a matter of simply believing what is taught by one's pastor or other significant teacher. For still others, it is a matter that relates to one's spiritual maturity or level of training about how to properly interpret the Bible.

In spite of all the differences, the most important thing for us to remember as we deal with this topic is that all true believers are members of the body of Christ, regardless of what they believe about any of the non-essential matters. It is certainly possible to hold onto our preferences and beliefs and still show great love and respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ who hold different positions. Christ died so that we could all be a part of his family. All Christians should demonstrate genuine love and respect to those who are legitimately members of his family.

The solution to the problem of division within the church is simple, though not necessarily easy. First, we need to get a strong grasp of what we believe about the non-essentials, as well as why we take that position. The second step is to gain an understanding of other positions and the reasons people follow those ways. Finally, we need to learn how to recognize non-essentials for what they are and not allow them to become barriers to fellowship with those who believe differently.

The fact of differing beliefs necessitates a situation where different denominations and churches exist. As mentioned before, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It allows individual Christians to focus on worship and spiritual growth in an environment where dissent is kept to a minimum. But this should not keep us from promoting fellowship with believers who are outside of our group. If we are able to keep these principles in mind, it becomes possible to agree to disagree on matters which do not affect our membership in God's family while retaining the ability to follow what we believe to be the correct way.

14. Evidence That the Christian Faith Is the Truth about Reality

By Freddy Davis

In our quest for the truth, we have this strong desire to have objective tangible proof that what we believe is right. Everyone wants this. No one likes the prospect of saying that my beliefs are all based on faith assumptions. That is too uncertain and leaves us with doubts.

But that is exactly the position we find ourselves in. When you shake down every belief system in the world, you ultimately come down to a foundation which is based purely on faith presuppositions. That is because no set of worldview beliefs can be empirically proven. So does that mean that any belief is just as valid as any other belief? Absolutely not!!!

While we can't empirically prove any belief system, we do have some ways to measure truth. Everyone in the world experiences life in certain ways. For instance, we are all subject to the law of gravity. No matter how much one believes it is possible to levitate, and no matter how hard one tries, it will never happen. As another example, we all have a need for relationship and to be able to communicate with others. And no matter how much a person tries to deny it, people the world over are driven to it.

There is a way that reality is structured and every worldview is an attempt to understand and live by it. But as we look at the beliefs of the various worldviews, every one that is not an expression of the truth posits positions which run contrary to the way we experience life. It is possible to line up every untrue worldview and point out the places where there is a misalignment with reality. But for now we only want to look at our Christian worldview and see how it does align with reality. This becomes the solid evidence that we can build our confidence on concerning our faith.

The testimony for the validity of the Christian faith falls into numerous classes of evidence, and here we simply want to expose those categories. There are scores of volumes written about each one, so we will not go into great depth here. Right now our purpose is simply to lay out an outline of the vast amount of evidence that we, as Christians, can use to back up our faith.

Evidence for the Validity of the Christian Faith Human Experience of Life Matches Christian Teachings

We experience life as personal, self-aware beings.

- -- God is understood to be personal and mankind is created in his image.\
- -- We have a sense of transcendence.
- -- God is understood to be transcendent based on the Biblical revelation.
- -- Human beings in virtually every society throughout the ages have had a sense that there is an afterlife and that there is a God.
 - -- We experience life in relationships.
 - -- The concept of the trinity makes God a person who's very essence expresses relationship.
 - -- God is understood to interact with mankind in a personal relationship
 - -- The structure of the human psyche and social organization is based on human relationships. We experience life based in spiritual qualities.
 - -- God is revealed to be a spiritual being and man is said to be made in his image.

-- Mankind operates in this world as a spiritual being which is revealed in such attributes as: self-conscious personality, intelligence, morality, creativity, ability to self-consciously communicate, etc.

We experience life based on natural laws.

- -- The Christian faith affirms that material reality is based on a fixed set of natural laws, while also acknowledging that God can intervene in material reality.
 - -- Natural law excludes spontaneous existence and the Christian faith posits a Creator.

We are capable of knowledge.

-- God is understood to have knowledge and mankind is created in his image.

We have a sense of morality.

- -- God is revealed as a being with a particular character which defines the boundaries of morality.
- -- God has created mankind in his own image which includes a sense of morality as an innate part of our very being.
- -- Christian morality is most consistent with a stable individual psyche and with a stable societal structure.

We experience time as linear.

- -- God has established material reality as a time based, non-repetitive reality.
- -- Time only has meaning within the context of a temporal physical structure.

We experience the world as objective.

-- God has revealed himself as an objective person.

Mankind Matches up with the "Image" Characteristics of God That Are Revealed in the Bible

One of the important aspects of human existence which is taught in the Bible is that man is created in the "image of God." That being the case, if we know what those "image" characteristics are, we can compare that with humanity and see if they match up. Once again, this is not definitive proof that the Biblical worldview is the Truth, but it is one more piece of evidence that points in that direction.

It is important to understand that the idea regarding the "image of God" is not a physical characteristic. In other words, man does not physically look like God. Rather, it is a set of characteristics which define the personhood of God and, thus, the personhood of humankind.

We know at least some of the characteristics of God because his character and qualities are spelled out in the Bible. Let's examine for a moment what we do know. God is:

- -- Eternal (Revelation 1:8)
- -- Self-conscious (Exodus 3:14)
- -- Reflective (Jonah 3:8-10)
- -- Self-determinate (Matthew 6:10)
- -- Personal (Isaiah 55:6-7)
- -- Transcendent (Jeremiah 23:24)
- -- Spirit (John 4:24)
- -- Able to have knowledge (1 Corinthians 1:20-25)
- -- Able to have dominion over the world (Genesis 17:1)
- -- Good (Mark 10:18)
- -- Just (Romans 2:1-2)
- -- Love (1 John 4:8)
- -- Relational (Revelation 3:20)

As we look at these characteristics, we see that, indeed, mankind is imbued with them. We, certainly, do not have these characteristics to the degree that they are displayed in God himself, but they are evident to the degree that it is possible within the human frame.

Evidence Related to the Bible

- -- The Bible has been accurately preserved and transmitted to us through the ages. The evidence for this is overwhelming.
- -- The Bible is consistent with itself even though it was written by approximately 40 authors over about a 1500 year period.
- -- The Bible contains literally hundreds of prophesies that have been fulfilled in minute detail. Some of those prophesies were made hundreds of years before the fulfillment.
- -- There is overwhelming archaeological evidence that the places and events recorded in the Bible are true.

Christ Is Who He Said He Was

The Christian faith literally rises or falls on the truth that Christ was who he said he was. If he was who he claimed to be, the truth of the Christian faith is virtually assured.

- -- Jesus Christ believed he was God. (Matt. 20:225-28, Mark 2:6-12, Luke 22:67-71, John 4:25-26, Rev. 1:17-18 and many more.)
- -- The eyewitnesses that lived and worked with Jesus believed he was God. (Matt. 28:9, John 1:1, Acts 7:55-60, Romans 10:13-14, 1:Cor. 1:1-2, Phil. 2:5-11, Col 2:9, Heb. 1:6 and many more.)

Jesus believed he was the Messiah. He was either crazy, lying or truthful. The strongest evidence is that he was telling the truth. The evidence of eyewitnesses to Jesus' life strongly backs this up. People who knew Jesus and were present are the ones who wrote the gospels and other New Testament writings.

Evidence Related to Historical Documents

The biographies of Jesus and other writings about the early church are accurately preserved. In addition to this, there is strong evidence of the truth of the New Testament's information from other writings outside of the Biblical text.

Evidence Based on Scientific Study

The archeological evidence is very strong. There has never been even one archeological discovery which has contradicted the Biblical account.

Rebuttal Evidence

There have been many attempts to discount the evidence concerning the accuracy of the descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry. None of them are able to stand up to scrutiny.

Evidence Related to Jesus' Messianic Position

Jesus matches up with the identity of Messiah from prophesy. In addition, his life stands the test in regard to the ministry he performed while on earth – he actually lived up to what he taught.

Evidence from the Medical Field

Medical descriptions of the death and resurrection of Jesus are strong.

Evidence of the Missing Body

After the resurrection, the body of Jesus was really gone.

The Evidence of Jesus' Appearances Following His Death

Jesus was seen after the resurrection by the apostles, close associates and over 500 more people.

Circumstantial Evidence

- 1. The disciples' willingness to die for their beliefs.
- a) No one puts their life on the line for a lie.
- 2. The conversion of skeptics.
- a) James, the brother of Jesus, was initially skeptical but he completely changed.
- b) Paul was originally violently opposed to the Christian faith, but an actual encounter with the risen Christ convinced him to become a follower.
 - 3. Changes to key social structures and a completely new theology among former Jews.
- a) The kinds of things which Jewish believers gave up were so central to their very identity that it is inconceivable that they would do it without some kind of radical evidence. And literally thousands experienced the evidence. This was in spite of, and in the face of, severe persecution, and even martyrdom.
 - 4. Communion and Baptism
- a) You wouldn't expect the celebration of an execution and a curse to become the focal points of a belief system, yet this is precisely what happened.
 - 5. The emergence of the church from nothing.
- a) It is virtually unheard of for a belief system to emerge and grow as this one did without any kind of violent coercion whatsoever.

Experiential Evidence

- -- On a personal level, my life has been changed by having come to know Jesus Christ in a personal relationship.
- -- The changed lives of billions of others throughout history is testimony of the truth of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

None of these evidences are empirical proof that the Christian faith is the truth about the nature of reality. Worldview beliefs cannot be demonstrated by empirical proofs. But they do give more powerful and profound evidence than any other worldview belief can muster. On top of that, they match up with the way we, as human beings, experience reality better than any other worldview belief.

Many people will cherry pick these lines of evidence and try to point out weaknesses. But there is not a single one which can be overturned. And taken together, the evidence is overwhelming.

It is certainly permissible for non-believers to investigate, or even attack, the evidence for the Christian faith, but only if they are ready to defend the weaknesses of their own belief system. What right does any person have to attack us from a foundation that is even more flawed?

But this puts a great responsibility on us, as well. We must become proficient in understanding worldview so that we can detect the weaknesses of the beliefs of those attacking us. But we must also know the strengths of our own worldview. This is the reason for grasping the evidence put forth in today's article.

The Christian faith is the most consistent belief system in existence. When we truly understand it, it changes our lives.

15. The Two "Big Why" Questions? By Tal Davis

Remember when you were very young. Everything was "Why this?" and "Why that?". Children just naturally ask such questions. "Why is the sky blue? Why is grass green? Why do we drink water? Why does Daddy have to go to work? Why do I have to clean my room?" Any mother knows the best answers to that last one is, "Because I said so, that's why!" Or, "Because I'm the Mommy!"

"Why?" is a big question, maybe the biggest of all, because it always implies a reason for something happening. And, by definition, anything having a reason must have someone that created the intention. In all of the history of human thought two really big issues beg the ultimate question: "Why?". The first question leads inevitably to the second. In this article we examine them and suggest reasonable answers to both.

The First "Big Why" Question

Years ago comedian Bill Cosby had an album titled, "Why is There Air?" Good question, and it leads to the first big "WHY" question: "Why does anything exist?" Or to say it another way, "Why is there something rather than nothing?"

If you are in the same room with someone as you read this, reach over and take his or her hand (careful, you may get a strange look). Now reach over and touch a table or chair nearby. Then take a deep breath. Have you ever thought about why those things even exist. Why are there people, trees, stars, planets, earth, animals? Even more challenging is to ask, "Why do *I* exist?" (Some might even ask, "Do I even exist?") When we consider this question we must admit there are only two possible answers.

The first possible answer is that everything has *always* existed and was not created. This is the perspective of the naturalistic worldview. However, those who hold this view cannot escape a number of major problems with it if true.

If the universe, and everything in it has always existed in some form and had no creator the following implications are inevitable. It means there is no meaning to the universe. There is no absolute truth. There is no absolute basis for right or wrong. There is no hope for life after death. There is no real human free will, it is only a self-delusion. Ultimately the universe and world will grow cold and die forever.

The biggest problem for those who deny a creator is that modern science has established that the universe is *NOT* eternal and had a beginning from nothing. For more than four decades, physicists and astronomers have found increasing amounts of evidence that the whole universe

and everything in it, including time, space, matter, and energy, suddenly sprang into existence out of pure nothing. So, that being the case, they have no explanation where anything came from.

The only other possible answer to this first big question, and only one that solves the problems above, is that everything was *created* by a Supreme Personal Intelligence (God). If that principle is true, then the universe has meaning. There is a basis for truth. There is an absolute basis for ethics and morals. There is hope for life after death. Humans actually may have free will. And the universe and world will not have to end.

Those are really the only choices. Either everything has always existed or someone (God) created it. This leads us to the second big question.

The Second "Big Why" Question

The second big question that we all must face is, "Why should anyone believe in God?" Surveys indicate that more than 90% of Americans believe in God. That may be so, but it still means a lot of people don't believe or aren't sure. Some of them exert a lot of influence on our kids and college students. In any case, most people who say they believe actually live as if God does not exist.

Of course, the Bible answers that God does exist and it was He who created the universe *out of nothing* (Gen. 1:1-2; Colossians 1:16). But, are there any good reasons to accept that as true other than pure blind faith? There certainly are. Below are four reasons why we can and should believe in God.

- 1. The first reason, simply, is that the universe does exist! Logic says that for every effect there must be a cause. Since the universe exists, something (or *someone*) must have caused it to exist. As we have seen, whatever or whoever it is must be unimaginably powerful and exist outside of the universe. Only *God* fits that profile.
- 2. The second reason to believe is because the universe has a design. This means that, since the universe exhibits purpose, order, and design, it must have had an intelligent designer. Think of it like this: Suppose you were walking in the in woods and found a small mechanism on the ground. You pick it up and notice that it keeps the time. Would you think that it was made totally by chance? Of course not! You would naturally assume it had a designer an intelligent watchmaker.

Now look at your hand. It is made up of millions of cells, each one far more complex than any watch or other manmade mechanism. The point is that all life shows the evidence of design. Furthermore, the odds of life existing on Earth by natural causes are incredibly small. Astronomer Hugh Ross and his team have calculated the chances for all factors necessary for life to exist anywhere in the universe at 1 in 101038. That's 10 followed by 1038 zeroes. Those are such impossible odds that many atheistic scientists now say life must have come to earth from space. Of course, that does not really resolve the problem.

The only real reasonable solution to this problem is that there is a God who created the universe and everything in it, including human life.

3. The third reason to believe in God is that nearly everyone, even atheists, acknowledges that some things are right and some things are wrong. In other words, all people recognize the moral difference between what is good and right and bad and wrong. Thus, there must be an absolute personal basis for moral values and law, otherwise *nothing* can be regarded good or bad, right or wrong. If that is the case, we cannot honestly say that even the most horrible crimes are objectively wrong. Unfortunately, in recent history we have witnessed the consequences of what

happens when atheistic regimes who understood that fact gained power. Both Nazism and Communism were founded on the concept that there is no God for which they were accountable.

The Bible says that everyone intuitively knows there is a God who holds them accountable. Sadly, though, people can deny and suppress that knowledge. As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-25: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (NASB)

4. The last, but certainly not least, reason we can believe in God is through His divine revelation in His Word and through Jesus Himself. The only way we know what God is like by Him telling us Himself. The Bible, through divinely inspired prophets and other writers teaches that there are attributes that are true about God and records the great events in history in which He worked. The ultimate revelation, of course, was Jesus Christ Himself. As the writer of Hebrews put it: God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2: NASB)

Conclusion

So, these are the two "Big Why" questions. First, why is there something rather than nothing? As we have seen, the only reasonable answer has to be God. Nothing else explains why the universe and anything in it exists. But also, we ask, why should we believe in God and why is that so important? It is not just an academic issue. If God does not exist then we have no real basis for meaning in our lives except to delude ourselves into believing it matters.

However, if God does exist, and we have good reasons for saying He does, then it means we were made by God for a purpose. We really matter! We are not just here by chance! It also means God wants to have fellowship with us because, as a personal being, He loves us!

Nonetheless, God holds us accountable for our actions because right and wrong exist and we are capable of knowing it. But, since we have sinned, God has made salvation possible thru Jesus Christ. When we understand and receive that life changing experience, we truly know God!

16. Where the Incarnation of Christ Fits into Worldview

By Freddy Davis

It is that time of year when our attention is drawn to the incarnation of Christ - the act of God where he stepped out of glory and put on human skin. I think we are all pretty much aware of the of the story of the birth of Christ. But there is a significance to this event that goes well beyond what we normally think about. Typically our focus is primarily on the events surrounding the

birth of the baby Jesus. But there is a significance that goes well beyond the story - even beyond the fact of its miraculous nature.

You see, when we speak of God stepping out of eternity and into time, we are talking about an actual person who injected himself into our earthly physical reality. In that act, he did something that had, and continues to have, an actual, objective effect on the operation of the world.

The profound meaning of this act cannot be overestimated. In fact, if you don't get the significance of the reality of this event, your personal faith will end up being shallow and your excitement about living out your faith in daily life will be deficient. That is because people don't put their whole effort into things that they don't believe are real in an objective sense. For instance, would you go on a worldwide search for an actual unicorn? Of course not! You know it is an imaginary creature and you would be wasting your time and money. On the other hand, would you train to run a marathon if you were assured that you would receive one million dollars just for completing it? Absolutely yes! In fact you would likely put yourself thorough all kinds of strain and suffering in order to condition yourself enough to run the required 26 miles, 385 yards. Why? Because the one million dollars is real and tangible to you.

Our worldview is the belief foundation which gives us our conception of who God is and what he is like. Unfortunately, there is a worldview which is very prominent in our society which asserts that the supernatural simply doesn't exist. While we, as Christians, don't believe that assertion, elements of that worldview have become so pervasive that it affects even our beliefs and actions. Intellectually we affirm the reality of God, but in life we often live as if he were not real. That is why we tend to be reluctant to share our faith and directly confront those who oppose our point of view. That is why we don't expect to actually meet God in our quiet time. That is why we don't expect God to actually work miracles in our daily lives. That is why we don't actively and often share our faith with other people. We simply don't put a lot of energy into what we don't consider to be objectively real.

To get at how this plays out in life, we need to do a comparison. First, let's become very clear about the beliefs that are taught in the Bible concerning the incarnation, and the worldview implications of those beliefs. Following that, we will look at the alternative beliefs of the other worldviews. Finally, we will make a brief comparison so that we can fully understand how the implications play out in life and eternity.

The Biblical View of Jesus' Incarnation

The first thing we need to understand relates to who Jesus is and what he is like according to the Bible. In a nutshell, Jesus is an actual, objective person. He was a historical human being who was born in the land of Israel during the time of the Roman occupation. Beyond that, though, Jesus was the actual human incarnation of God himself. God took the form of a human being in order to live life among his creation. He did this in order to reveal himself more fully, and through his death and resurrection to fulfill the requirements for the salvation of mankind.

Just to drive this point home a little more clearly, Jesus was not a "mere mortal," he was not a phantom, he was not merely a prophet or some great religious teacher. He was also not simply one of a series of incarnations who each provided a greater revelation of God. Nor was he some kind of "not completely human" manifestation of God. He was, literally, God who chose to enter the world by the same means that all of the rest of us entered the world, and who lived life on earth as an actual human being.

This is important because the teachings of Christ, along with his death and resurrection, actually accomplished results that have eternal effects. But the effects are based entirely on whether or not individuals receive it that way. If God did not literally become a man and do what he the Bible says he did, then the salvation that is taught in the Bible is not true and is not available. And if he literally did do what is asserted in the Bible, the person who does not accept it as truth is not in a position to apply God's salvation to his life.

Other Views of Jesus' Incarnation

There are some other views of who Jesus is. Every worldview has a tendency to treat him in a particular way, though there are variations within them, as well. Let's look at some of the possibilities and their implications.

Theism

Of course, Biblical Christianity is a form of Theism, and the above view is its specific expression. But there are other forms of Theism, as well. In general, Theistic belief systems do acknowledge that Jesus was an actual historical figure. There are differences beyond that, though, as to who they believe he was. Just to give a few examples, Islam considers that he was merely a prophet. Mormonism considers him to have been a man who became a God after his death on earth. Jehovah's Witnesses don't acknowledge him as the incarnation of God, but teach that he was an angel before he came to earth, and that he returned to that form after physical death.

While it is plain to see that there are various approaches to who he was, the tendency of Theism is to see Jesus as an especially holy man, but not God. As a result, he is not acknowledged to provide the means of salvation. He only pointed mankind towards it.

Naturalism

Naturalism has two different ways that its adherents tend to address Jesus. Some consider that he was nothing more than a mythical figure who never really existed in history. Others acknowledge his historical existence, but since the supernatural is not acknowledged to exist, Jesus is viewed as a mere mortal – perhaps an extraordinary man, but a mortal none the less.

The implication, here, is plain. If there is no God, and if Jesus was merely a regular human being, he has nothing to do with the salvation of humanity. He may have left humanity a good legacy for doing good, but that is about as far as it can go.

Animism

Animistic thought basically considers Jesus to be in the same category as any of their religious leaders. He is looked upon as a shaman or witch doctor. He was, obviously, one who had a special connection to the spiritual part of reality, but Animism does not acknowledge a special need for a Savior. Whenever a person dies, they automatically enter the spiritual world as a spiritual being.

The result is fairly obvious. He was not a savior, only an especially gifted shaman who was able to help people have a more effective interaction with the spiritual world.

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought looks at Jesus as one of the many incarnations of God who came to earth to point people in the right direction. Some even go so far as to assert that his silent years,

between age twelve and the beginning of his public ministry, was spent in India learning the "Truth" based on Hindu beliefs.

Under Far Eastern Thought, Jesus is not seen as a savior, as a savior is not needed in this system. Jesus was merely a human who was at his last material incarnation before merging with the impersonal "Cosmos."

How The Incarnation and Worldview Fit Together

As can be seen by these brief descriptions, who a person considers Jesus to be is not some mere abstract, philosophical point. It actually determines how we live and what kind of purpose and meaning we experience in life. It determines, or at least influences, who, or what, we turn to in order to find meaning for our lives and salvation for our souls. If Jesus truly is God who provided salvation through an actual incarnational existence, we must respond by entering into a relationship with him based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If he is believed to be something else, then the response toward him will be different.

As a bottom line assertion, Jesus Christ is God. And it was the work he did during his incarnation, as an actual human being, which supplied humanity with the means to enter into a personal relationship with God. By understanding and acting on this knowledge, we are able to actually take hold of salvation and live out its implications for our lives.

17. Life After Death, What Will It Be Like? Part 1- Popular Erroneous Views

By Tal Davis

"Eternity is very long, especially toward the end." Woody Allen

One of my favorite movies is the 1982 Sci-fi classic Blade Runner, directed by Ridley Scott. It is the story of a man (Harrison Ford) in a future world whose occupation was seeking out and killing escaped "replicants." Replicants were synthetic adult humanoid beings manufactured to be slaves for real humans. Actually, the replicants were practically human in every way and were even programmed with implanted false memories. However, they all had a sort of built in "expiration date" of only four years before they died. Occasionally some of them would escape, so licensed bounty hunters called Blade Runners would have to "retire" them early.

The story is exciting as an action film, but the plot runs deeper as it takes on questions of what is human, what is the meaning of life, and how do we (replicants and humans) face the inevitability of death. What happens when we face that final moment, as does one of the rogue replicants (Rutger Hauer) when he realizes it is his "time to die?" The question we all ask is, "What, if anything, happens next?"

In my next four articles we will examine biblically the issue "Life After Death: What Will It Be Like?" Our first installment deals with some of the more popular, but erroneous, views about this issue. The second will address the biblical teaching about what happens at the time of physical death. The third installment will examine the biblical teaching on the eternal destiny of the believer. The forth, in contrast, will focus on what the Bible says about the destiny of the unbeliever.

Popular Erroneous Views

People come to the question of life after death with all kinds of preconceptions of what it will be like. Unfortunately, most, including many identifying themselves as Christians, have serious questions as to whether or not the Bible is correct on the matter. People obtain these views from their family, religion, and even popular culture. Here is a short list of some of the more common erroneous views about life after death.

1. Total Annihilation

The annihilationist view says simply that there is no life after death. It assumes, with total resignation, that physical death is the end of conscious existence. When the body dies, so they say, and the brain ceases to function, then all conscious being is gone. All is total oblivion. This is the primary perspective of those holding a naturalistic worldview. The assumption is that human consciousness and the illusion of free will are only the temporal experiential results of the biochemical and electrochemical processes of the brain. When those processes cease, then the experiential results will cease as well. And that's that.

2. Reincarnation

Most people holding a Far Eastern worldview assume that people's conscious spirits are immortal. So, they reason, that following physical death they are reborn into new physical bodies. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism are three ancient religions that have reincarnation as primary tenets. Other modern movements have adopted this perspective including many of the New Age movements and Scientology.

Those who hold this view actually can give no objective evidence, either scientific or historical, that it is valid. It is entirely a faith perspective, yet millions around the world, and even in America, believe it is the absolute truth.

3. Spiritism

Spiritism, also known as Spiritualism and Necromancy, is the belief that when people die physically their immortal spirits go to a disembodied spirit world. These spirits, so they say, may be contacted by the living through specially gifted individuals called mediums. Mediums have the ability to cross through the veil of death to communicate with those who have passed on to the other side. Many Spiritists also affirm some concept of reincarnation.

This belief was, at one time, very popular in the United States. In the 19th century, many professional mediums traveled the country publically demonstrating their techniques for communicating with the dead. Thousands of audiences and clients paid them big sums to contact their dead loved ones. Eventually the fad died down when the methods were proven to be false by debunkers, including the world renowned illusionist and escape artist Harry Houdini (1874 - 1926).

Still, today millions of people believe and practice Spiritism. Several religious organizations are dedicated to its promotion including the National Spiritualist Association of Churches, the National Spiritual Alliance, and the United Spiritualist Church Association.

The Bible is quite clear about God's condemnation of occult practices, especially spiritism or necromancy (see Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:9-22; I Samuel 28; I Chronicles 10:13, 14; Isaiah 8:19; 19:3; 2 Kings 23:24; Acts 8:9-24; 13:5-12; 19:19-20). Christians should never even dabble in these dark practices.

4. "It's a Wonderful Life"

Another of my favorite films was Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. You probably know the story of George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) who, after falling on hard times, decides it would have been better if he had never been born. So heaven sends an angel named Clarence Oddbody to rescue him and teach him a great lesson about life. It is a nice plot except for one problem; according to the story, the angel, Clarence, had at one time been a man who died years earlier. He was now working on earning his wings to become an "Angel First Class."

It is a common misconception, even by some Christians, that when good people die they become angels in heaven. Some religious groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints (Mormons), actually teach this doctrine. They assert that humans, angels, and even God the Heavenly Father, are all of the same species.

The Bible, however, gives no indication that this is the case. People do not become angels. According to Scripture, angels are angels and humans are humans. At times, angels may communicate with humans or intervene in human affairs, but they are an entirely different order of existence.

5. Conditional Immortality

Another widely held view of life after death is called conditional immortality. This view maintains that humans are not naturally immortal and don't even have immortal souls. So, say those holding this perspective, when people die they wait in the grave in an unconscious state until a physical resurrection at the end of time. This view is has been held by many Christians historically, and is sometimes called "Soul Sleep." It is the official doctrine of some major groups like the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Advent Christian Church, whose statement of faith reads: We believe that death is a condition of unconsciousness to all persons, righteous and wicked; a condition which will remain unchanged until the resurrection at Christ's Second Coming, at which time the righteous will receive everlasting life while the wicked will be "punished with everlasting destruction;" suffering complete extinction of being. (emphasis in original) (www.adventchristian.org)

This is also the official doctrinal stance of the Jehovah's Witnesses. They like to quote certain passages out of context that they argue teach this concept. One of their favorites is Ecclesiastes 9:5. The official Jehovah's Witnesses Bible translation, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT), translates that passage thus:

For the living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, *they are conscious of nothing at all*, neither do they anymore have wages, because the remembrance of them has been forgotten. (emphasis mine)

The Jehovah's Witnesses and others' use of that passage as a proof-text for conditional immortality is problematic. The book of Ecclesiastes was written to portray the meaninglessness and cynicism of life without God. At that point in biblical history, the full doctrinal scope of life after death had not been revealed. Therefore, an obscure passage like that above should never be taken as a basis for a theological position on an issue as crucial as death. We must always interpret such passages in light of clearer biblical statements, especially in the New Testament.

So these are a few of the common erroneous ideas about life after death. In the next installment, we will examine key Bible passages that provide a clear understanding of what really happens at death.

18. Life after Death, What Will it Be Like? Part 2

What Does the Bible Teach?

By Tal Davis

"To be or not to be, that is the question." (Hamlet: Act 3 Scene 1)

So stated the Melancholy Prince as he contemplated taking his own life. In this most famous of all Shakespeare's Soliloquys, Prince Hamlet weighs the value of his painful life with the possibility of escape to a peaceful sleep in death. People still wonder about what will happen when they die. In this four part series we are examining the key questions of how some people think or have been taught, and what the Bible actually says.

In the first installment we presented some of the popular but erroneous concepts of life after death that many today, even some Christians, accept as fact. Here is quick review;

- 1. Total Annihilation This view says simply that there is no life after death. It assumes with total resignation, that physical death is the end of conscious existence. It is typical of Naturalists.
- 2. Reincarnation This view assumes that people's conscious spirits are immortal and are reborn into new physical bodies. Those who hold this view actually can give no objective evidence, either scientific or historical, that it is valid. This is characteristic particularly in Far Eastern Thought and the New Age Movement.
- 3. Spiritism Spiritism or Necromancy is the belief that when people die physically, their immortal spirits go to a disembodied spirit world. These spirits may be contacted by the living through mediums. We indicated that the Bible condemns all occult practices, especially Spiritism or Necromancy (see Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:9-22; I Samuel 28; I Chronicles 10:13,14; Isaiah 8:19; 19:3; 2 Kings 23:24; Acts 8:9-24; 13:5-12; 19:19-20).
- 4. "It's a Wonderful Life" Another misconception held by many people, even some Christians, is that when good people die they become angels in heaven. The Bible, however, gives no indication that this is the case. People do not become angels.
- 5. Conditional immortality This view maintains that humans are not naturally immortal or have immortal souls. So, when people die, they wait in the grave in an unconscious state until a physical resurrection at the end of time. This is the official perspective of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

So if all these views are wrong, what is right? We must go to the source of truth, the Bible, for our answers. In this installment, we look at what Scripture says about what happens at the time of death. In the following installments we will consider the final destinies of both the saved and the lost at the end of time.

Here are several essential teachings from Scripture on what happens at death.

The first thing to address is whether or not there is life after death at all. The Bible absolutely affirms the expectation that people will live on after this life. For Christians, this belief is based primarily on one of the best attested facts of ancient history; the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. This belief is based on several key lines of evidence that are virtually indisputable. (1) Jesus Christ was crucified, was dead, and was buried. (2) His tomb was found empty on the first day of the week when examined by both friends and enemies. (3) More than 500 people were convinced they saw the risen Jesus after his resurrection. (4) The New Testament church was absolutely convinced the resurrection was true and no other reason can explain why it grew so

rapidly in and around Jerusalem in just a few years (see: Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; Acts 1; 1 Corinthians 15).

So, strong historical and eye-witness evidence supports the Christian contention of live after death. But what then will it be like? And will everyone experience it alike? The Bible provides good clues about what to expect.

At death, all people experience an interim period of a disembodied state waiting for bodily resurrection. The Bible indicates that when a person's body dies, his or her spirit lives on. Believers are ushered immediately into the presence of Jesus. There they will stay in a conscious but disembodied state to await the final resurrection at the end of time. Unbelievers, likewise, will be in a conscious state until the Lord's return when they also will be raised to face God's judgment. But it will not be the same for both groups.

At death, this interim state has several joyous qualities for the Christian. First, in will be in the presence of God. (see: Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 16:22; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; and 1 Thessalonians 4:14). Second, it will be in a heaven like place called Paradise (see Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4; Revelation 2:7). Third, the believer will be completely awake, fully conscious, and communicative (see Matthew 22:31-32; Luke 16:22-23; John 11:26; Philippians 1:23). Finally, it will be a state of blessed rest (see Revelation 14:13). Thus, it will be a blessed, but incomplete, state of existence for the believer.

In contrast, at death this interim state has dire qualities for the unbeliever. As with the believer, the unbeliever will be fully awake, conscious, and communicative (see Luke 16:23-26). However, It will be a place of separation from God (see Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 16:23-26). Also, it will a place of torment for the lost, but not their final state of existence (see Luke 16:23-26; 2 Peter 2:9). That will be determined at the final judgment.

In both cases, for the believer and the unbeliever, these interim states are temporary. Life after death has its fulfillment in a bodily resurrection and final judgment where all people will be consigned either to eternal life in heaven or eternal separation from God in hell. These final destinations will be subjects of the following two installments.

19. Life After Death, What Will It Be Like? Part 3

The Eternal Destiny of the Believer By Tal Davis

Benjamin Franklin once wrote: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Or, as Margaret Mitchell says in *Gone with the Wind*, "Death, taxes and childbirth! There's never any convenient time for any of them."

Death, of course, is a prime subject of movies. For instance, in the recent series called Final Destination, Mr. Death stalks survivors of an accident who thought they had escaped their fate. Death is not a pleasant subject and many people would just rather not talk about it. When a person dies we say, "He passed on," "She's gone to her reward," or "He had a race well run," etc.

Billy Graham once asked Woody Allen if he believed in life after death. Allen said no, but "I am packing an extra pair of undershorts." (In his case they may need to be fire resistant.)

Or maybe you heard the old joke about the Texas oil millionaire who died and was buried in his gold Cadillac. As it was being lowered into the ground someone was heard to say, "Man, that's really living!"

The fact is everyone dies. This is the third installment in a series on "Life After Death, What Will It be Like?" Jesus said everyone, good and evil, will live for eternity (see Matthew 25:46ff (The Greek word *aionios* means eternal or everlasting and includes both quality & duration).

In this article and the next we will examine what the Bible says about our "Final Destination." Here we will focus on the biblical teaching of what will be the eternal life and a home in Heaven for those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. This was guaranteed by His resurrection.

Let's examine four facts about the eternal destiny of the believer.

1. The Eternal destiny of the Believer will begin at the judgment seat of God.

The Bible constantly speaks of Divine justice. For instance, Paul says in Romans 14:10, "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." He reiterates that in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

This divine judgment is for all people, including Christians. However, we understand that our salvation will not be decided by our works but gained by grace through faith in Jesus (see Ephesians 2:8, 9). So, if we depend on Christ alone as we face God's judgment we who are saved will be assured to go to heaven.

But, we ask, what will it be like? Will we sit on clouds and strum harps? Let's see what one key book of the Bible indicates.

2. The Eternal destiny of the Believer will be in the presence of God.

In the book of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, the Apostle John describes, well, an indescribable vision of Heaven. He identifies it as the "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:1-7). In verses 3 and 4 he proclaims: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."

When the people of Israel journeyed in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, they carried with them the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of God's presence. The Ark was kept in the center of the camp in a large tent called the Tabernacle. There, God's presence was constantly with them. In Revelation John says God's presence (tabernacle) is eternally among men. This presence results in joy, no death, and no sorrow for believers living with Him.

It's important to recognize something at this point. John uses imagery to describe the indescribable. His best attempts to put into words what he saw were at best limited. The reality would be so much more! Like Marco Polo supposedly said on his death bed: "I have not told half of all I saw in the East."

As Christians, we will be in God's presence and bathed in the light of His love. This does not mean we will know everything about Him. That would be impossible as He is an infinite and eternal being. However, we will eternally grow in that knowledge of Him (so it will not be dull in heaven).

3. The Eternal destiny of the Believer will be in the beautiful city of God.

Early in the 20th century, thousands of immigrants came to America from Europe and other regions. Many of them had the idea that the USA had streets paved with gold. I'm sure many of them may have thought that was true as they passed the statue of liberty and saw the gleaming skyline of New York City.

Obviously, American streets were never paved with gold. However, in Revelation the Apostle John described a city that was every bit as beautiful as we can imagine. In Revelation 21, John

says he saw the New Jerusalem, descending from heaven like a bride adorned (vss. 2, 10-11). He even describes its walls, gates, streets, and dimensions (vss. 12-21).

It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles (12,000 stadia); its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards (144 cubits), according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

It helps to understand that in Hebrew numerology, 1,000 is a perfect number. In this case, it is multiplied by another perfect number, twelve. It is then multiplied again by itself. So, 12,000 stadia times 12,000 equals 144 million square stadia. This enormous number means that the heavenly city is spacious and perfect to house God's redeemed people. Verses 13 and 21 speak of twelve (there's that perfect number again) gates of pearl. The implication is that we enter the city through pearl gates reflecting the Pearl of Great Price: Jesus Christ.

John also mentions that no temple was found in the city nor was a sun or moon needed. I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. (vss. 22-23)

4. The Eternal destiny of the Believer will be as a garden of abundant life.

Beautiful gardens are special. The blooming flowers and trees light up our eyes with color and beauty. Perhaps you recall Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic book titled "The Secret Garden." It is the story of a spoiled English orphan girl who, with two friends, finds a hidden garden that changes their lives. The story has been the subject of several movies. One was produced in 1949 that I especially enjoy watching. The film was made in black and white, except when the children go into the Secret Garden. Then it becomes a Technicolor world of brilliant flowers and birds.

Not only does John describe his vision of heaven as a city, but in Revelation 22 he sees Heaven as a wonderful garden. He states that it includes in its midst the Tree of Life, nourished by the River of Life and "bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (vs. 2).

Heaven is a place where we will have all our needs met: water, food, health, etc. The source of it all is not the Sun, but God's eternal light (vs. 5). This scene contrasts with the Fallen Garden of Eden.

The important thing to understand is that if you are Christian you have a great eternal adventure to come. Faith in Christ makes you an inheritor of all that God has in store in heaven. Heaven is our destiny, and we should live in light of it today.

In the final installment we will consider the tragic destiny of the unbeliever.

20. Life After Death, What Will It Be Like? Part 4 The Eternal Destiny of the Unbeliever By Tal Davis

"I don't think a loving God could ever send anyone to hell!"

Ever heard that argument? I can't tell you how many times I have had to answer that objection, even from professing Christians. If we examine the issue carefully, we see that the real problem they have is not if they believe lost people go to hell, but whether or not they believe the Bible is authoritative. The Bible clearly describes the eternal destiny of the unbeliever as a state of eternal separation from God in a place called hell.

In our last installment we discussed the delightful question of the eternal destiny of the believer. In this article we will look at the other side of the coin: the eternal destiny of the unbeliever. Granted this is one of the most difficult Christian doctrines to address. It has often been denied, even by theologians and church leaders. However, it cannot honestly be ignored if we claim to believe the Bible and Jesus Himself. The Bible and Jesus teach that those who reject the Gospel and do not know Him as Savior and Lord will be separated from God for eternity.

In our first installment we looked at a number of passages that give us clues as to the nature of believer's eternal life. Now we must do the same with this issue. One primary biblical source for studying these questions is the book of Revelation. In that writing, the Apostle John described the visions he saw of the events of the conclusion of time. Revelation 20:11-15 is one example of what John envisioned as the fate of humanity: 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

From this and other passages, we can assert four ways the Scripture presents the eternal destiny of the unbeliever. As we do, we need to keep in mind a principle of biblical interpretation that we mentioned before. Even as John tried to describe heaven in human language, we must remember he was describing the indescribable when he spoke of the fate of the lost. That being said let's consider what the Bible says about the eternal destiny of the unbeliever.

1. The eternal destiny of the unbeliever will be an experience of unending death.

Death is hard subject for many people to deal with emotionally. Many would just as soon ignore it as to have to consider its consequences. I recall years ago hearing the late song writer/banjo player/singer John Hartford on TV answering questions from folks in the audience. One lady asked what he thought about what happens after death. He said, matter of factly, that life just ends. He never thought about it much. The irony of it was that not long after that he was diagnosed with Leukemia which he battled for 20 years until his death at age 63. I imagine that must have made him think more about it.

In any case, physical death is real for everyone. For the unbeliever, however, the Bible describes a more intense form of spiritual death. For instance, Paul says, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6: 23). He means that the consequence of sin is not just physical cessation of life but eternal separation from God's presence. It ultimately results in what John called the "Second death" (see Revelation 2: 10, 11 and 20: 6, 14). This "second death" refers to eternal separation from God.

As I am writing this, it is April, 2012. One hundred years ago this month, on April 15, 1912, the passenger ship RMS Titanic hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean and sank to the bottom of the sea. 1,514 people died in the wreck and 710 survived, none of whom are still living. Now fast forward to the year 2112. The chances are nearly certain that by that date, just as is now true of the Titanic survivors, no one reading this article will still be alive. One way or another, we will all die. If we are Christians, it will be a new beginning. If lost, it will be unending death and destruction.

2. The eternal destiny of the unbeliever will be a state of punishment for those who have not repented of sin.

The writer of Hebrews in chapter 10, verses 28-31, contrasted those who rebelled against Moses' Law with rebels against the Son of God. Clearly he says that those rejecting Christ are more deserving of punishment.

28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Paul, in Romans 2:5-8 also underscored the righteousness of God's wrath.

5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

The point is that God is all-loving but he is also holy and just. He must punish sin. I recall a few years ago my wife had to go to court because of a minor traffic incident. She was afraid that

she would have to pay a fine, but instead the court's clerk came out and offered everyone there that day the judge's "Christmas Special." All they had to do was accept it.

God is the perfect judge and demands perfect justice. And we are all guilty! However, God has offered all of us his "Good Friday Special," meaning that He took the punishment upon Himself in Christ on the cross. However, He will not deprive anyone of his or her will to reject His offer. Those who choose to reject or ignore Christ's pardon will suffer the full extent of punishment for their sin.

3. The eternal destiny of the unbeliever will be a place of outer darkness.

I have a two year old granddaughter. At night my son and daughter-in-law always leave the door to her bedroom open and have a night-light burning in her room. Why? Because she is, like most small children, afraid of the dark. To them it represents the unknown and danger. Even adults do not like total darkness.

Perhaps that's why Jesus described the domain of the unsaved as "Outer Darkness." Consider what he says in Matthew 25:30, at the finish of the parable of the unfaithful servant. "And throw this good-for-nothing slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

He used the same imagery in Matthew 22:13, "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The Apostle Peter also used that description in 2 Peter 2:17 for the fate of the wicked. "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved."

Likewise, Jude 13 speaks of the wicked as ... "wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever."

Just think for a moment of being deep inside a cave completely beyond the reach all light. That's one way eternity will be for the unsaved. It will be inhabited by those wailing in ultimate dread like a child in the dark cut off from the ultimate source of light: God. It will be a state of absolute loneliness. Despite what some people like to think, there will be no wild parties in hell. They will be lost, alone, and in eternal night.

4. The eternal destiny of the unbeliever is described in terms of unquenchable fire.

When most people think of hell they see it as sort if a boiling pit or oven. Much of that imagery is a result of medieval art and writings like Dante's Inferno.

When I was a teen football player, we had preseason practice in August. Florida in August is a place of extreme heat and unbearable humidity. But we went out twice a day in full pads. I remember in the midst of the misery thinking a few times that I must have died and gone to hell.

But is this place of eternal burning the Bible's picture of what hell will be? Let's take a look at what it says.

In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the Rich man. Lazarus was a poor but righteous man who died and went to Abraham's Bosom (heaven). The rich man who had shown goodness in his life was sent to *Hades*. From there the rich man called out, "Father Abraham! Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this flame!"

Jesus has Abraham reply to him sadly, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you

are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and *that* none may cross over from there to us."

Other key passages that use this same imagery are below.

- -- Matthew 18:8, 9 "If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, rather than to have two eyes and be thrown into hellfire!"
- -- Mark 9:46-48 (parallel) describes as "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."
- -- Jude 23talks of the need to show love to "save others" by "snatching [them] from the fire.
- -- Hebrews 10:27 "but a terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire."
- -- Revelation 20:14-15 "This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."
- -- Revelation 21:8,9 "But the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Our answer must be, "Yes! That burning imagery *is* indeed one way the Bible describes hell." Now, we must remember our interpretative principle. These images of hell, like John's visions of heaven, are descriptions of the indescribable. We must look at the Bible's total picture. In some ways they almost seem to contradict (i.e. darkness vs. fire). Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that they all describe the horrible reality of eternal separation from God. As the late Bible scholar Dr. Ray Summers stated: "A person having difficulty in such apparently opposite terms as the 'blackness of darkness' and the 'devouring flame' can take little comfort in avoiding the literal if he understands that reality is always worse than representation. If hell is the kind of place that is represented in the New Testament, how terrible is the reality of that fate." (Ray Summers: *The Life Beyond*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959. p.196)

In conclusion, according to the Bible, the tragic reality is that those who are without Christ have no hope when they die. They will, indeed, spend eternity separated from God in a place of suffering called hell. For that reason, we, as Christians, must aggressively seek to share the Gospel with the lost. There is no other hope. As Hebrews 9:27 warns, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment." As Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

21. How Does a Christian Worldview Affect Our View of Government? By Freddy Davis

In America, we are currently right in the middle of a political season. And as we survey the current political landscape, two very different visions of the purpose and use of government come into view. As Christians, we need to be very discerning in the way we interact with the possibilities. While the Bible does not advocate a specific form of government, there are some principles that emerge out of a Christian worldview which inform how a government should operate.

A Christian Worldview Concept

Based on a biblical worldview, government exists to promote an environment which provides for the work of God to be accomplished in the world. This does not necessarily imply a theocracy. However, God did create the world and humanity for a specific purpose, and every part of life, including government, should be an instrument which allows that purpose to be fulfilled.

Based on biblical teachings, God's purpose is that every person come to know him in a personal relationship and live in fellowship with him. Thus, a godly government provides the means for this to be accomplished. To be sure, it is not the government's job to do the work of the church. Government should not be dictating religious beliefs and practices. But it is its job to provide an environment where the church can freely advance the purpose of God. The provision of this environment is enabled by having laws and regulations which allow people in society to have freedom to do the work of God.

As the framers of the American constitution did their work, they had this purpose clearly in mind. And the constitutional republican form of government which they chose was designed to create this environment. The constitutional approach was designed to mimic the idea of an objective, absolute authority. As God's law was seen as the absolute authority for the faith and practice of individuals, the constitution was designed to be the absolute authority for the operation of the government. This approach has built into it the two primary responsibilities of a government based on a Christian worldview – deliver justice and promote societal order. The framers of the constitution also attempted to build in checks and balances to keep government from overstepping its role and squelching human freedom. The perceived need for this was based on their understanding of the need to check the fallenness of man.

A Non-Christian Worldview Concept

There are, of course, other forms of government which could also accomplish these goals. However, with other forms it is much easier for man's sinful nature to get in the way. Human beings have a tendency to usurp God's power for themselves when put in a position to wield the levers of governmental power.

In modern American society, there is a move to create a governmental structure which has a different purpose than what was originally established. This alternative structure is born out of a Naturalistic worldview and has its most prominent expressions in socialism and communism. Rather than recognizing the accomplishment of God's purpose as its primary goal, this form finds its purpose in the hopes and desires of humanity. And, of course, the particular humans which get to determine this are the ones who have control of the levers of power.

The entire basis of this approach is relativism based on the desires of those in power. As such, law is subject to the whimsical interpretations of those who hold power. There is no recognition of an absolute authority or of the fallenness of man.

Contrasting the Two

Obviously, the approach taken to governing has significant effects on the approaches and priorities of governmental operations. For instance:

1) Social issues - Under a Christian worldview approach, morality is expressed in law as an objective standard. Using a Naturalistic worldview approach, morality is changeable based on the whims of those in power.

- 2) Economic Issues Under a Christian worldview approach, individual responsibility is the ruling concept for the acquisition and disposal of wealth. A Naturalistic worldview approach sees economics as the domain of the government and subject to the dictates of governmental authorities.
- 3) Foreign Affairs Based on a Christian worldview approach, the promotion of freedom based on the purpose of God is the ruling concept. Using a Naturalistic worldview framework, the priorities are based on the perceived best interests of the nation as understood by the one's wielding governmental power.

The Priority of the Spiritual over the Political

As Christians, we recognize the objective reality of God and his purposes. And, while we must live in a physical world subject to the limitations of our physical existence, we do recognize that the physical is, in the end, subject to the spiritual. The ultimate authority is God, and his purposes must govern the way we structure every part of life – including government.

As we watch what is going on in modern society, we are seeing a shift to a different approach which values the material over the spiritual. This is outwardly expressed in numerous ways. We see:

- 1) Judges who create new law from the bench based on their own beliefs.
- 2) Judges who interpret existing law in ways which are contrary to the original intent of the writers.
- 3) Presidents and governors who governs by czars and bureaucratic decree rather than by following the constitution and the law.
 - 4) Executive officials who refuse to enforce and defend laws they don't personally agree with.
- 5) Legislative officials making laws which benefits themselves and their friends rather than focusing on what is best for society based on God's overall purpose for government.

All this being said, whatever form a government ultimately takes does not affect the priorities of God or of Christians who are determined to follow him. God's priorities are for all people to know him in a personal relationship, regardless of the form of government they must live under. It is just that some governmental forms promote our ability to do that better than others.

The worldview foundation of a nation does affect the operation of the government in some very specific ways. While it is possible for sincere Christians to disagree on various policy issues and priorities, we cannot disagree on the worldview foundation if we wish to retain the freedoms we have under the law. A Christian worldview provides a means and an impetus for retaining these freedoms. A Naturalistic approach works in the opposite direction. While it is still possible, Christians ought to be diligently living out a Christian worldview in a way which not only keeps a priority on the spiritual, but which also promotes the kind of freedom which allows God's work to be accomplished in the material world.

22. A Christian Worldview Understanding of ChristmasBy Freddy Davis

Obviously, Christmas is a distinctly Christian celebration. That being said, the celebration tends to have incorporated traditions from other places, as well. It has also been co-opted by retailers, politicians and even the general public and turned into a celebration with many extra-

Christian characteristics. While I don't personally have any problem enjoying some of the extra-Christian elements that have become associated with the holiday season (like Santa, decorating the Christmas tree, viewing the Christmas lights, shopping, enjoying secular Christmas music, and the like), I do think it is important for Christians to keep in mind its true meaning and make sure that our celebration has its focus there.

In order to do that, we will take a look at Christmas from a Christian worldview perspective. The starting place for understanding the true significance of Christmas is with the essentials of the Christian worldview. Once we have that, it is easy to see just where Christmas fits into the Christian faith.

Based on Biblical Authority

The foundation of a Christian worldview is established solely in the Bible. Thus, a Christian worldview belief about Christmas comes from the Bible's teachings. Any belief about Christmas which does not come from the Bible cannot legitimately be considered Christian. Thus, while we can enjoy holiday traditions associated with the Christmas season which come from other places, we must be able to distinguish between what is part of the Christian faith and what is not.

Christmas, in Christian terms, is not merely a holiday for fun and family. There was a very specific reason why Christmas had to happen. It was a part of the very plan of God for the redemption of mankind. Without the historical events of the Christmas story having actually taken place, mankind's salvation from the bondage of sin could not have been accomplished. The story of that salvation, and the place of the Christmas story in it, has been revealed in the Bible.

Based on the Nature of God

The Bible teaches that God is a particular kind of person, and certain elements of his personhood have a specific connection to a Christian understanding of Christmas. In particular, we need to note the fact that God is a relational person. As Creator, he created humanity so that he could enjoy a relationship beyond himself. This concept is key. As a Trinity, God exists in relationship as an element of his very existence. This relational aspect of his personhood carries over from his relationship within himself to relationships he is able to have with the other creatures of his creation whom he made with the characteristics of personhood.

Based on the Nature of Man

According to the Bible, mankind is also a particular kind of creature, and the elements of our existence have a part to play in the story of Christmas. God created humanity in his image – that is, as persons capable of a self-conscious, loving relationship with him. God created mankind this way specifically so that this kind of relationship with him would be possible.

Initially, this relationship actually existed with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, because of the Fall, sin entered the world and caused a break in the relationship between man and God. God desired, however, to repair the break. This repair would require an act of God which is at the root of the Christmas event.

Based on God's Plan for Mankind's Salvation

Mankind's salvation (the fix for the sin problem), was based on God's love for this creature who had been created in his image, but also on his justice. Sin had to be judged, and the penalty for sin is death. The one required to pay the penalty is the one who commits the sin. Because of human frailty, every single human being has sinned and falls under the judgment of God.

But there was a way for man's problem to be solved and restore the relationship with God. That solution required a holy sacrifice. It required a man to live a worthy (perfect) life then substitute himself for the guilty sinners as a sacrifice. As no mortal human being could qualify for this role, God determined to come to earth and live life as a human in order to become the sacrifice himself. The man Jesus Christ was this human.

Jesus was born of a virgin by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life on earth which qualified him to become the sacrifice for man's sin. At the appropriate time, he died on the cross as that sacrifice and rose from the dead demonstrating that he had the power to overcome sin and death. At that point, it is left only for individual human beings to acknowledge what God has done and personally receive his provision for themselves.

A Literal Solution for a Literal Need

The story of Christmas is not fiction. God is real, sin is real, man's separation from God is real, and Christ's birth, death and resurrection are real. God has done everything necessary to restore man's broken relationship with himself.

Christmas is one part of that story. We celebrate the birth of Christ because that was the event that put into play the solution for our separation from God. As such, while it is okay to enjoy the various extra-Christian trappings associated with the holiday season, Christians need to be especially grateful to God that he was willing to go through with fixing our sin problem.

The true meaning of Christmas is found in what God has done for us in the Christmas event. He came to earth as a baby in order to accomplish the things necessary to provide for our eternal salvation. Our celebration of Christmas should include deep gratitude to God for the salvation he has provided and offerings of praise for his worthiness. As we celebrate the season, we should be especially focused on ways we can wade through the clutter in order to live out personally and share with others the true meaning of the Christmas celebration.

Part 3 Implications of Worldview

23. Why Every Christian Needs Worldview Understanding By Freddy Davis

There was a day when the Christian public at large did not need to have a grasp of the topic of worldview. In those days, there were two primary groups which found value in this topic. The first group consisted of scholars. These were, typically, social scientists doing research to try and understand relationship dynamics between cultures. The second interested group were those who found worldview knowledge useful because they actually worked in cross-cultural environments. For Christians, this has been particularly helpful for missionaries.

But the days of the Christian public having no need for this knowledge has come and gone. We now live in an environment where the world has come to us. In saying this, I don't mean

simply that people from other countries have immigrated to the U.S. – though that is, certainly, true on a massive scale. It is actually a much larger issue than that. In addition to immigration, there has been a cultural transformation from within.

I am, actually, using the word culture in a rather loose sense, here. By it, I am not merely making an ethnic reference. Rather, my focus is on people's beliefs. Thus, even fully acculturated Americans can be divided into "belief cultures" based on the worldview they subscribe to.

The reason for making note of this fact is that those who hold different worldviews actually have different ways of understanding reality. For instance:

- 1) A Naturalist believes there is no such thing as the supernatural.
- 2) An Animist believes there are many gods which manifest themselves in nature.
- 3) A Far Eastern Thought believer believes in a transcendent, impersonal life force and karma.
 - 4) A Theist believes there is an objective creator God.

There can be no overlap between the four ways of understanding reality, as each position literally contradicts all of the others (For example, God can't exist and not exist at the same time. There can't be only one God and many gods at the same time.). That being said, many people do try to incorporate beliefs from more than one worldview into their lives and simply live with the contradiction. But, for the most part, a single individual falls into one of the four camps.

The problem we run into, as Christians, when we want to talk about our faith with people from a different worldview culture, is that we don't share a common understanding of reality. What one thinks to be a totally obvious conclusion, the other thinks is totally absurd. For instance, as a Christian, I believe abortion is totally immoral because it is the taking of an innocent human life. I read an article the other day, though, about two Naturalists in Australia who wrote a book not only defending abortion, but also what they called "after-birth abortion" (infanticide). Their reasoning is that a fetus or new-born cannot be considered a person in the "morally relevant sense" of the word. For them, a fetus or a new-born is not yet a real person. The difference in the understanding of reality between a Christian and these Naturalists regarding the nature and value of human life could not be further apart. Of course, this is only one example. The same basic problem occurs any time you are dealing with people who have different worldviews.

The Value of Worldview Knowledge

So, if a Christian wants to share Christ with someone who holds a different worldview, a bridge must be built to span the worldview gap before the message of the gospel will even make sense. As such, understanding worldview is not just for leaders and professionals anymore. Every believer who takes seriously the great commission needs to learn how to build worldview bridges. These worldview bridges accomplish several important things.

Understanding Our Own Faith for Personal Confidence

The first thing we see is that many Christians struggle to understand their own faith. The primary reason for this is that they simply don't make the effort to do so. Another major reason for this problem is that most churches don't have a systematic way to train their people beyond the hit and miss approach of worship services and Sunday school classes. It is not that there is any problem with these programs. It is just that they have a different purpose and are typically not well suited to help people lay a full-blown, systematic foundation for their faith.

An in-depth understanding of our faith, though, provides for personal confidence. Worldview training puts us in a position to truly grasp the full extent of our faith. It is this kind of knowledge which gives us confidence to stand up in the face of opposition and to share a witness to those who need Christ.

Understanding the Faith of Others for Effective Witness

Another important reason for grasping how to build worldview bridges is so that we can understand the faith of others in order to share the gospel message with them. It is pointless to begin sharing the gospel with someone who is convinced that our beliefs are silly, pointless or incomprehensible without first building a worldview bridge. Without knowing a person's default beliefs, we may not be able to craft our message in a way that is understandable to the hearer. It is quite likely, in our day, that a worldview foundation needs to be established before a gospel presentation is possible.

To Properly Fight the Culture War

There is no question that we live in a world which is hostile to the Christian faith. Hostile attitudes are one result of this, but many times this hostility is expressed more tangibly in the culture. Non-Christian worldviews are now even producing actions in the culture and policy from the government which are overtly hostile to Christians. This is expressed in everything from rampant immorality to the suppression of human liberty.

As Christians, fighting the culture war is not our first priority. That would be to encourage the advancement of the Kingdom of God. However, fighting the culture war cannot simply be put to the side. The truth is, when the culture is allowed to become debased, an environment is created which makes it all the more difficult for the work of God to be accomplished in the world. As Christians, we are called on to spread the gospel, but also to stand up for what is right. An understanding of worldview helps us understand the foundation of these anti-God elements of the culture war and gives us tools for pushing back.

How Do We Get this Understanding?

Everyone wants the easy way out, but some things just have to be worked for. You can go to church and listen to the preacher and Sunday school teacher and get a certain level of knowledge of our basic Christian doctrines. But the kind of in-depth understanding that will give your spiritual life true depth requires a more significant commitment. Don't get this wrong. This is not a put-down of any pastor or Sunday school teacher. It is just that worship services and Sunday school classes are not generally designed for the purpose of giving that kind of in-depth training. They have an entirely different purpose.

Think of your profession. What does it take to get to the highest levels? If you just went to an informal class with no accountability one hour per week, could you achieve the top levels? Absolutely not! It generally takes many hours of dedicated study with many more hours of hands-on experience. This is true whether the training is done in a classroom or on the job.

Unfortunately, too many Christians see their secular vocation, rather than their Christian faith, as the number one priority in life. For most, the Christian faith is a passive element where individuals go and listen to someone else who has done all of the study and work, and merely try to glean a devotional thought from them.

But in God's economy, our Christian faith is to be our primary focus. Our vocation is merely the means God has provided for us to take that faith into the world. So, if we don't put significant

effort into developing our Christian faith in a way which allows us to be effective for Christ in daily life, our vocation is devoid of a large part of its meaning.

The solution to this is to take the initiative to gain the knowledge base necessary to express our faith fully in the world. There are many places to get this knowledge. There are books and articles to read, classes and seminars to participate in and people available who will be glad to answer your questions. One significant repository of knowledge can be found on the MarketFaith Ministries website at www.marketfaith.org. There are scores of articles, videos, podcasts and blog posts that can be accessed for free. There are other resources, like books and CDs, that are available for purchase. There is even a certification that can be achieved.

No matter the current level of expertise you have in your Christian faith, you can gain more. And the more you gain, the more ways God will be able to use you to build his kingdom. Begin with a commitment to seriously begin that journey. Then begin at your current starting place and put yourself on a road to growth which allows you to become the kind of Christian God intends for you to be.

24. The Spiritual State of Our Nation

By Freddy Davis

Frankly, the spiritual state of our nation is horrible! Over the last week or so, I have talked with several parents who are struggling with choices their children have made. These choices include getting involved with groups of people who influence them to drink, take drugs and participate in sexual relationships outside of marriage. If you are a parent, you know the agony this struggle brings as you try to influence your kids the right way. And this is only one example of the struggle we face. Why in the world is it so hard these days?

I have a son that I have helped raise as he went through high school and college. I know the struggles parents face. I also know that what kids have to deal with these days is qualitatively different than when I was in school. It is not that peer pressure and opportunities to make bad choices didn't exist in my school days. I grew up in the 1960s and 70s when the modern drug culture and "free love" mindset was being birthed. But what was only a baby then is now a full-fledged adult. Kids these days are having to grow up in a society that truly believes drinking alcohol, taking drugs, and participating in sex outside of marriage really is a normal thing for them to participate in. It is presented as normal in the media, in the political arena, in the entertainment industry and even in our schools. It is so pervasive that it is now the ones who don't want to participate in these activities who are considered the outsiders.

And what is true for teenagers is just as true in the adult world. Modern American society readily accepts many things which used to be considered deviant and literally persecutes those who don't fall into line. All we have to do is look around and see the many ways Christians are being persecuted in our country.

Why Is it Happening?

What happened to cause this? Simply put, it has been a worldview shift. It used to be that American society was primarily dominated by a worldview based on Christian Theism (sometimes referenced as the Judeo-Christian ethic). The worldview foundation that now dominates society is Naturalism.

This change didn't happen overnight. It really started back in the late 1800s when Darwin's work gave a so called "logical" framework as to how a Naturalistic approach could be scientifically justified. Even though there is no real science which can demonstrate that a Naturalistic approach is true, the appearance of a justification was enough to provide the impetus for the movement.

As more and more people bought into this belief, these believers in Naturalism entered realms of influence in the media, politics, education and pop culture. As always happens, there came a time when it reached a tipping point and spilled over into general society. That is what was happening in the 1960s and 70s. From there, it has only become stronger.

There are, of course, many people who are very disturbed at what is happening. There is a huge fight in the political arena right now as we as we engage the presidential campaign. Much of the fight centers on issues related to the very nature of morality. We also see persecution of Christians and the lashing out against Christian positions in government and even in private industry with many believers pushing back on that front. We see the Occupy Wall Street movement and its anti-capitalist rantings and the resistance to that. We could go on and on with other issues regarding the sexualization of the culture, abortion, homosexual marriage, human trafficking, and so on. The fight is on in every arena of our culture.

What Can We Do?

So, as Christians, what can we do about it? Individually, we are only one voice and the movement against us seems so overwhelming. But, all is not lost.

The first thing we must always keep in mind is that God, himself, has an agenda and it will ultimately win out. There have been many times in the history of the world when evil has seemed to triumph, but in the end God will have his way. This knowledge ought to give us encouragement and strength for our fight.

Secondly, we must remember that we are not alone in our disagreement with current trends. There are literally millions of people who are as frustrated as we are. Knowing that there are many others who believe as we do ought to provide another level of strength and encouragement.

Thirdly, we must commit to do our part. It is not enough to just believe the right thing, we must also live it out in life. And what is our part? It is simply to be faithful to what God wants out of us. This will be different for every person.

God has not called every person to become a politician who can go in and change the political direction, but he has called some who must be faithful to that call. What every believer can do is vote for the people who are faithful to God.

God has not called every person to enter the entertainment industry or to participate in the media. But every believer can vote with their feet by only giving their money to entertainers and supporting sponsors who share our values.

God has not called every person to become a teacher or administrator in the educational arena. But those who are called can strand strong in it and, again, we can vote with our feet as to which schools we will support.

The situation did not become what it is overnight. And it will not change to what it ought to be overnight, regardless of what we do. We have allowed things to go too far for an easy change to occur. It will require all Christians to be faithful in all areas of life over a long period of time.

Specifically, there are three things we must do. First, we must ratchet up our faithfulness to God based on our relationship with him. We can never have the strength and confidence to fight evil in the world without this. Secondly, we must learn not only the "what" of our faith, but also

the "why." We have to master an understanding of worldview and Christian apologetics. Finally, we must actually step up to the plate and engage the world. Nothing changes until people's hearts change and that will not happen unless we are willing to actually share a witness.

The spiritual state of our nation is horrible. But it doesn't have to stay that way. As believers act faithfully to fulfill God's purpose in daily life, we can influence change. God is already at work in people's lives to create that change. Our place is to partner with him to make it happen.

25. What is the Real Choice in Abortion?

By Freddy Davis

There is no question that the topic of abortion is one of the real hot button issues of our day. And there is a very strong and outspoken lobby which is active and adamant that abortion should remain the law of the land. When advocating for "abortion rights," proponents put forth some very interesting arguments as to why it should be legal.

The first argument asserts a woman's right to personal choice and privacy. They say that the whole abortion debate revolves around a woman's right to have control over her own body. They claim that no outside person should have the right to tell a woman what she must do with her body. It is her own business and she should have the right to make her own choice.

Another argument claims that restricting abortions leads to back-alley procedures which put women's lives at risk. They argue that abortion should be affordable, safe and legal in order for women to be protected.

A third argument is that teen pregnancy leads to all kinds of social problems and that most teens are not ready to be parents. They should, therefore, not have to carry a child to term which they will be unable to properly care for.

Another common argument is that women who become pregnant by rape or incest should not be forced to bear a child created under those circumstances. They claim that it is simply not right.

Finally, it is argued that unwanted children are highly subject to abuse by a parent who does not want the child. If a child is unwanted, the mother should not be forced to have it.

Essentially, pro-abortion advocates defend their position based on issues of personal choice, privacy, rape and incest, convenience, economics, child abuse, and the like.

This is not to say that these issues are not significant. But they completely miss the single most important issue of all. They entirely ignore the fact that every abortion kills a completely innocent human being. Not a single one of the pro-abortion arguments above can possibly justify this outcome.

Think about each of these issues for a moment. Should a pregnant mother have the power to take the life an unborn child based simply on a "right to choose?" Should the privacy rights of one individual trump the right of another to live? Should a child be exterminated because the means of conception was bad or even traumatic for the mother? Should a baby be killed because bearing it will be inconvenient for the mother? Should a pre-born child be killed because the parent(s) can't afford another child? Should a person's life be snuffed out because it might be brought into the home of someone who may not be a good parent?

Looking at it this way, the answers to the questions are obvious. There is no legitimate reason to kill an unborn baby.

But if we are going to make an assertion like this, there is one more issue that we must address. In taking this anti-abortion stance, we are also making an assumption — an assumption that the pre-born child is fully a human being. Many abortion advocates assert that the unborn are not yet real human beings, so aborting them is not killing a child.

This forces us to answer the deeper question: Is an unborn child an actual human being? Is an unborn baby nothing more than a non-viable mass of tissue in a woman's body, or is it something more? Is that tissue simply a "potential" human being, or is it a "real" human being? Let's look at the facts.

First, we know that a fetus is alive from the moment of conception. Science has shown definitively that the cells which comprise the fetus are living. There is life there.

Secondly, we know that from the moment of conception the fetus forms a distinct human being. It is not simply inert tissue in the mother. It is an individual person which is different from the mother's body. When a sperm and egg come together, they create a new person with distinct characteristics which are not just like either the mother or the father. The coming together creates a unique being with its own DNA.

Finally, we must affirm that this unique, living being has value from the moment of conception. The value of a human being is not in the physical form it holds at any given moment. Nor is it derived from the ability of an individual's body to perform particular functions at any given moment.

Just because a fetus does not yet have the form of an adult, does not lower its value. The fact is, the physical form of a human being changes throughout life. A child does not look like a teenager, does not look like a middle aged adult, does not look like an elderly person. All stages are the proper look of a human being at those stages. This applies to a fetus, as well. It looks like a human being is supposed to look at that stage of development.

Just because a fetus cannot execute the functions that a normally functioning adult is able to perform also does not lower its inherent value as a human being. Using that kind of reasoning, we could argue that people under anesthesia or in a deep sleep have less value. The same could be said for those who were born with mental or physical handicaps, those who have lost limbs or have lost the function of some part of their body due to disease or accident. Even without the complete functioning of certain parts of the physical body, the individual person is still there. The value is in the person, not in physical appearance or attributes. As a result, individual "rights" must be based on inherent, not physical capacities.

Abortion is not a preference issue. We don't get to choose whether or not another individual gets to live or die based on our own personal desires. A pre-born baby is not ice cream where we get to choose whether or not we want to eat it based on personal tastes. It is an actual, living, individual person who has as much right to life as you or I.

So, what worldview perspective could possibly assert a value set which would approve of abortion? Where does the idea come from that abortion is not the killing of an innocent life and that it is simply a matter of personal preference? Or where does the thought come from that a human life in the form of a fetus has a low enough value that it is okay to kill it based on our own convenience?

The worldview assumption underlying this viewpoint believes that human life, at least preborn human life, does not have as much value as the life of one who is already born. This includes the belief that there is no such thing as moral absolutes and all we have to base our morality on is personal preference. This point of view emerges directly out of Naturalism. That is, there exists no God who has defined morality for humanity. We must create our own.

The Biblical worldview has an entirely different perspective. God has revealed in Scripture that human life is a gift from God. Human beings are persons who are created in the image of God. The spiritual person that we are did not exist until God created us at the moment of our conception. Since God created it, it belongs to him, and human beings do not have the right to exterminate innocent human life.

The real choice being made when one chooses abortion does not relate to personal choice, personal rights or convenience. It relates to life and death. When an abortion takes place, a child is killed. As Christians, we have a sacred obligation to protect life because it is a person that God created for the purpose of relationship with himself.

26. What Is It That Makes Pornography So Bad?

By Freddy Davis

Pornography is any image, picture, statue, advertisement, writing, etc. whose purpose is to create sexual titillation. In modern Western culture, sex has become such a public topic that the lines between what is legitimate and what is illicit are harder and harder to draw. In fact, sexual images have become so prominent that what used to be considered soft porn, is now considered tame enough to be on prime time television. And while it used to be that people could only get access to it in magazines behind the counter – and then only at certain stores – it is now so pervasive that virtually anyone can access any kind of porn through the most basic internet connection. Many now even question why Christians think pornography is such a big deal.

It is possible for a person to become desensitized to just about anything. Many people who live around abject poverty get to where they hardly even notice it. People who play violent video games often become so desensitized that even real violence is seen as no big deal. This technique is even used by the military to desensitize young recruits. And to get into the topic we are dealing with today, pornography has become so prominent in our society that we hardly even notice it anymore – much less think of it as something bad and destructive. A great example of this is the many "soft porn" TV commercials advertising everything from lingerie to hamburgers. It is so prevalent that most people aren't even embarrassed anymore when they are shown.

Recently, in the news, several high profile stories have emerged which have pornography as their common denominator. An assistant US attorney was caught trying to set up an opportunity to have sex with a five year old. The governor of South Dakota has come out in support of the major expansion of a hardcore pornographer in his state because of the money it will bring in. And almost every day you can find stories of people who are being arrested for soliciting minors online. Typically, the focus of these kinds of stories is on the acts that are committed. But what you will find, if you dig a little deeper, is that the root of the acts is a perverted sense of sexuality which is fueled by pornography.

There are many reasons why pornography is a bad thing. Some of those reasons include the fact that it is instrumental in breaking up marriages, it desensitizes people concerning the true significance of sexuality, it objectifies people – turning them into objects of self-gratification instead of persons of worth – and it creates literal addictions which, in turn, lead to acts of perversion like those noted above.

From a Christian perspective it is bad because it rips people out of their personal fellowship with God. God created sexuality as a good thing with a profound purpose. But even good things can be used in bad ways and pornography is one of those perversions. It takes something that

God created to be used and enjoyed within the bonds of marriage and makes it purely an object of self-gratification. In any area, when our life is focused on gratifying ourselves rather than accomplishing the purpose of God, we have put ourselves in a position which is outside of our relationship with God.

There are two major reasons why this has become such an issue in our day.

The first reason is that the Naturalist worldview has become so prominent in our society. Naturalism accepts no moral absolutes. It totally denies that a God exists, and therefore there is no such thing as a set of moral values which is given by a higher authority. That being the case, the only possibility which exists is for man to create his own values. There is no reason, then, for any kind of sexual expression to be considered wrong or bad – including pornography. This is the worldview of a large percentage of people in the industries which control much of the public discourse – entertainment, news media, and higher education.

The second reason this has become an issue is because the values of the Naturalist have seeped into belief system, and corrupted the worldview, of a large number of people who claim to be Christians. George Barna, a well-known Christian pollster, has confirmed this over and over with his surveys which show that the lifestyle of the average Christian statistically differs very little from those who are not Christians. So, what we end up with is a large group of people who give lip service to Christian values but who live as if they were Naturalists. This allows the Christian values to remain in the public square just enough to create tension, but not enough to eliminate pornography. In other words, Christians are looking at porn as much as non-Christians.

Our problem, as Christians, is that the values of the Naturalist have become such a part of the thinking of modern society that we have totally lost any sense of why pornography is bad. To top it off, the addictive nature of viewing pornography has already entrapped a large number of Christians – even Christian pastors and other leaders.

So, just what is the truth about pornography and what are the implications? What is it that makes pornography so bad? There are four basic things we need to consider.

First, sex is not some value-neutral issue. It was created by God for a specific purpose and *only* to be expressed within the bonds of marriage. The production and use of pornography takes something that was created by God and employs it for a purpose outside of his own – for a self (human) centered purpose. If the God of the Bible is truly the person he has revealed himself to be, we must understand that we do not have the prerogative to take God's things and use them in other ways.

The second reason pornography is bad emerges out of the first. Sexual gratification outside of marriage alienates a person from God. By definition, living in a manner which goes against the ways of God is sin, and, since our holy God cannot allow sin in his presence, this puts a person outside of his presence. God's purpose for mankind is for us to conform our lives to his purpose and ways. Those who participate in the production and use of pornography in any way are putting themselves in a position of opposition to and alienation from God. He is not unfair in doing this. He gives us the understanding of what is right and the means to live in it. The choice of whether or not we follow his direction, is our own.

The third reason pornography is bad is that the industry itself uses people in ways which destroy them. As an industry, pornography objectifies individuals. Those who are working in the industry are not looking for ways to serve God, they are looking to make money and satisfy themselves. They do not see human beings as people made in the image of God whom he values, but as objects which can bring a handsome price. This self-centered point of view which denigrates humanity runs completely contrary to the way God designed things to be.

The fourth and final reason pornography is bad relates to those who view it. People who view pornography are also objectifying others for personal gratification, and doing it in a way that drags themselves down, as well. Human beings are individuals which God created with an inherent dignity and value. First of all, those who view pornography are setting themselves up for an addiction to something which requires looking at other people as objects of self-gratification. Secondly, they are devaluing the people they are looking at. This is all contrary to God's purpose and ways.

In spite of the fact that pornography, in its various forms, has become quite prominent in our society, it is not a positive development. Its existence runs contrary to the purposes of God and it is destructive to humanity. Its existence represents a worldview that runs counter to the ways of God. As Christians, we need to be living and expressing our own faith (worldview beliefs) in a way which not only serves to eliminate this destructive influence, but which, literally, changes the hearts of individuals.

27. Worldview and Sexual Immorality

By Freddy Davis

Background for Understanding Morality

What is immorality, anyway? We seem to intuitively know what it is in a general sense, but there is an awful lot of disagreement about the specific applications. A lot of people also see exceptions to the general rules, especially when it comes to their own life situations.

But the actual definitions regarding what is moral and what is immoral come from somewhere. There is some authority that people accept regarding what is appropriate and what is not

This is where we end up with so many different viewpoints about it. Different people accept different authorities, and this forms the foundation for the worldview beliefs that they acknowledge. Since there are a limited number of worldviews, it should be relatively easy for us to dig this out.

Before we do that though, let's acknowledge an obvious phenomenon in modern society. In our day, much of the sexual activity that the Bible considers to be immoral is very common, and is accepted as okay or even moral. Research done by the Barna organization indicates that, overall, this trend even carries over into the Christian churches. There is not a lot of difference in the values and actions of people who claim to be Christians and those who don't. This piece of data points to the fact that non-Biblical worldview beliefs are prominent in every part of American society.

It is obvious that this is the case, but just where do the values come from that have become so prominent? And, how have these beliefs become strong enough to override the traditional Biblical moral values in our society? To get at this, we need to examine all of the possible sources of values. We are able to do this by looking at the four worldviews and understanding how they are influencing the culture. So, just how do the different worldviews determine what is moral and what is immoral?

Naturalism

A Naturalist does not believe that there is such a thing as God, or any supernatural reality for that matter. Since there is no external source for moral values, there is no other possibility but for human beings to make up their own. Typically there are two principles that Naturalists draw upon to determine what is moral and immoral.

The first is the survival of the species. This is usually looked upon as the most important principal and is understood to be coded into our DNA. Anything, then, which would cause problems with the survival of the species is considered immoral.

The second principal is the satisfaction of personal desires. Since there is no transcendent moral code, nothing is immoral. There may be actions which are looked down upon, or even banned, by society because they are deemed to interfere with the first principal. But nothing is, in and of itself, immoral. Therefore, if it feels good, and you can get away with it, anything is permissible.

Animism

For Animists, morality is founded upon the order of the universe. The universe is understood to consist of both a physical part, where mankind lives, and a spiritual part, where the gods exist. These two parts of reality are symbiotically connected with one another. Those in the physical realm depend on the gods in the spirit world to help make life run smoothly. At the same time, the spiritual beings depend on those in the physical world to do certain activities to make things run smoothly in that realm. If the beings in either part do not act properly, problems occur. Morality, then, relates to acting properly to the benefit of the entirety of the universal order.

The way human beings learn what is moral and immoral is basically by trial and error. When a person does something that displeases the gods, bad things begin to happen. When the humans figure out what the problem is, it is possible to make it right. When they do, things begin to get better. Over time, the accumulated knowledge of the generations becomes known by everyone, and the moral order can become codified.

Far Eastern Thought

In Far Eastern Thought, morality is more like an object that attaches to your life force. Since individual living things are not understood to be personal, there is not a personal component to morality. The idea is that certain actions which a person performs in life cause good karma to attach to the life force, and other actions cause bad karma to attach. Good karma is an impetus for the life force to move forward toward an escape from the material world and its pain and suffering. Conversely, bad karma causes a backward impulse which would make it take longer for the escape to occur. So, good morality is based on what generates good karma. The actions which cause forward and backward progress, then, determine the definitions of what is moral and immoral.

Theism

Theists believe that there is a God who created the world and man, and who has his own set of rules which define morality. Typically this set of rules have been conveyed to mankind by some form of revelation so that people can follow them and please God. Actions which follow God's instructions are considered moral while those which go against his ways are believed to be immoral. The specific things which are considered moral and immoral might be different based on the individual Theistic belief system. Each one has its own authority source which is considered the revelation of God concerning morality.

Christianity

While Christianity is a form of Theism, we have to treat is separately because we have a specific authority source which we acknowledge to be the revelation of God – the Bible. In the Bible we have an explanation of what is right and wrong (moral and immoral). But in Christianity, morality is more than simply following a list of rules. It is actually based upon the character of God himself. And it is as a person lives in relationship with God that the power to live according to his ways becomes possible.

As a result, the relationship a person has with God is more important than the actions that a person takes in life. This does not mean that the actions are unimportant. In fact, the person who does not do what God expects is living an immoral life. The reason this is so is because wrong actions are evidence that the relationship with God is out of whack. When a person truly loves God, he or she does not want to do anything which will harm the relationship.

Why Does it Matter What We Do Sexually?

We are not, here, going to put up a defense for why the Christian approach is right and others are wrong. (For articles on this topic you can check out the resources section and the Worldview Made Practical article archives at www.marketfaith.org.) This article is for Christians and assumes that those reading it already believe that the Christian faith represents the Truth about the nature of reality.

At this point we simply want to look at what the Bible says about sexual immorality. The general thing we need to understand is that God created sexuality for a purpose, and abuse of that purpose creates destruction in the lives of individuals and in society.

1. God's Plan for Sexuality

God's original plan for sexuality was to populate the earth and to create a special bond between a husband and wife. When God created mankind he was looking to make a being who was like himself and with whom he could have fellowship. The fact that this was corrupted by the fall does not destroy the original purpose. God is still seeking to populate the earth in order to create a race of people whom he can fellowship with.

2. One Flesh

When God established marriage, it was designed to be between one man and one woman. When the two enter into the marriage relationship, which includes the sexual part of it, there is a special spiritual bond that is also established. There is an aspect of the image of God that neither man nor woman have by themselves. The unity of the marriage relationship creates what the Bible refers to as "one flesh." This completes this element of the image of God in the couple.

3. Importance of the Family

It is God's plan to build his kingdom among mankind. This kingdom is founded upon the desires of God himself, and is based on his righteous character. An important element of that relates to order. Without order, it is almost impossible to accomplish any purpose. Anarchy, in any aspect of life, breaks down the order necessary to accomplish a goal. If God's goal is that people become like him in character and interact with him as a family, then anything which breaks down the social order, particularly as it relates to family, keeps God's purpose from being

fulfilled. The family is the foundation for society which God has established and which is necessary to accomplish his purpose.

4. The Damage of Sexual Immorality

As has already been alluded to, sexual immorality destroys the order in society which God has established to accomplish his purpose. It does damage throughout society in general and within the lives of the individuals who participate in it.

The specific sexual acts which run contrary to God's purposes include such things as adultery, bigamy, polygamy, exhibitionism, fornication, homosexuality, pedophilia, pornography, bestiality, prostitution, and rape. It is interesting that for many in society, certain of these acts are looked at as being not nearly as bad as others. In fact, some are actually even considered to be perfectly acceptable behavior.

But every one of them run totally and completely contrary to God's purpose for mankind. Each one has a damaging effect on society as it breaks down the social order that God deems necessary to build his kingdom. And every one has a damaging effect on individuals as it separates them from God – no matter how good a person they might be otherwise. The acceptance of these sexually deviant behaviors is an indication of the acceptance of beliefs which come from non-Christian worldviews.

According to our Christian worldview, it is God who decides what is moral and immoral. It is up to us to adjust to him, not for him to adjust to us. And we don't do this by simply avoiding a list of sins. Rather, we do it by entering into a loving relationship with him which is so profound that we don't want to displease him by participating in activities which go against his purposes.

When our worldview is aligned with God's purposes, we don't live negatively by trying to avoid sin. Rather we live positively by aggressively living life in our love relationship with him and participating in the activities which please him. With God's way as our worldview foundation, expressing our sexuality as only between a husband and wife within the bonds of marriage makes for an exciting and fulfilling life.

28. The Beliefs Which Allow Judicial Activism in America By Freddy Davis

Over the last several years there have been all kinds of complaints about judicial activism. This is the situation where judges have taken it upon themselves to create law from the bench, rather than doing the job that their position is designed for — which is to interpret the law.

The American system of government is designed so that there is a legislative branch, which is charged with making law, an executive branch, whose job it is to carry out the law, and a judicial branch to arbitrate disputes when people disagree as to a *specific* application of the law. In the case of judicial activism, the judges have stepped beyond their specific authority and taken for themselves the power to tell the legislatures what kind of law they must establish. In recent times there have been several very high profile cases where this has occurred.

Perhaps one of the most wide ranging situations was when the Supreme Court of the United States found a "right" for abortion in the United States Constitution when none is expressly given. Rather than let state legislatures decide what the law should be for themselves on this

issue, which is how it should be, the Supreme Court essentially created a new law and forced the states to go along.

Another case happened when the Massachusetts Supreme Court made the same kind of decree from the bench regarding homosexual marriage. In this case, they told the state legislature that homosexual marriage was a right guaranteed by the state constitution (though it had never been seen to exist before that time) and that the legislature must specifically write it into law.

Recently, blatant judicial activism has happened again – this time in California. In 2000, the people of the state of California passed a citizen initiated proposition which enshrined traditional marriage into state law. But now, the California Supreme Court has suddenly found a "right" to homosexual marriage in the state constitution and decreed that the law which had been duly passed by the people was unconstitutional. So, with the stroke of a pen, they created new law from the bench.

As we look at these situations, we can certainly debate the proper role of the various branches of government. But in this article, we want to go a bit deeper than that to look at the role worldview plays in creating a mindset which allows judges to believe that it is okay for them to create law this way. As we explore this topic, the particular element that affects this issue relates to what the worldview asserts regarding the nature of morality. In order to have a deeper understanding of the worldview implications, we will take a brief look at how each worldview might deal with this. The following explanations are intentionally simplifications and do not try to deal with the nuances related to degrees of rightness and wrongness. Our purpose here is not to give a comprehensive explanation of nuances, but to explore the underlying principles upon which law is based.

Animism

For Animism, morality is determined by the gods who exist in the spirit world. When they are pleased, they cause good things to happen to individuals who are doing right toward them. The things which please the gods are the definition of moral rightness. As it relates to law, it is up to society to figure out the things which please the gods and enshrine those behaviors in the legal code. As a result, the law has a foundation which lies beyond the physical world, even though there is not a concrete way to get at it. Mankind figures it out as he lives life and sees how the gods react to various actions.

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought also has a transcendent source for its moral code, though, in this case, the source is not personal – it is the impersonal life force. This does create a problem, though, since an impersonal force cannot share information of any type. In practical terms, we have is a very similar situation to what exists in Animism. Human beings are left to figure out right and wrong based on what they observe happening in the world.

Over the centuries, religious leaders claim to have figured it out by observing what causes things to go well and what causes things to go badly for people. Based on karma, pieces of the life force move either forward or backward through successive incarnations in the attempt to achieve the ultimate goal – to escape the material world and merge with the central body of the impersonal life force. Based on experience, religious leaders observe what causes good and bad karma. This observation has become the basis for law. Things that cause good karma are made legal while those which cause bad karma are made to be against the law.

Theism

The American legal system is based on a Theistic worldview foundation – more specifically, Christian Theism. Theism recognizes a personal transcendent God who has revealed himself, his ways and his desires to mankind. Right and wrong are understood from this revealed on and these principles have become the basis for establishing the law. What God has revealed to be bad is made to be illegal and the things revealed to be good are made legal.

Naturalism

Since Naturalism does not acknowledge the existence of anything supernatural, there cannot be any transcendent source of morality in any respect. Morality becomes nothing more than the consensus of society or the will of the one(s) with the power to enforce their will. This is the worldview foundation which provides the justification for activist judges to assert their own will over the will of society. Granted, this is not supposed to happen based on the rule of law which is the basis for the American legal system. But if no transcendent person (God) exists who is able to tell us what is right and wrong, then there is nothing to stop powerful judges from imposing their will if they can get away with it.

What Does this Mean for Christians?

The fight in America today, as it relates to how to create and interpret the law, is primarily a struggle between a Theistic and a Naturalistic worldview approach. While there are people who hold the other two worldviews, they are not prominent enough on the American scene to make any significant ripples in the debate. Naturalism and Christian Theism, however, are in a life and death struggle to capture the heart and soul of American society.

If we are interested in keeping our societal foundation based on the rule of law, then it is critical that those who hold a Theistic belief system, particularly Christians, stand up more than ever and advocate for positions, and vote for politicians, who will take us down this road. This approach is one in which God is recognized as the supreme lawgiver and in which the laws which are established in society are derived from God's revelation. This does not mean that we are looking to create a Theocracy. Rather, it is the recognition that the supreme authority for the country is the law, and that society is based on the rule of law no matter the prevailing social whims. Under this system, it is certainly possible to make changes in the law, but it is done by representatives who are acting based on the will of the people, rather than by a small group of judicial activists.

On the other hand, allowing for a Naturalistic approach to dealing with the law puts society in a position where there is no completely predictable means of ordering society. Laws may be passed by legislatures, but if people who do not recognize the supremacy of the law are able to climb into positions of judicial power, they are able to grant themselves the ability to say which laws are legitimate and which are not. In this case, the law becomes changeable based on the whims of the people who become judges.

In our day we are seeing the result of this Naturalistic approach as judges around the country are literally creating new law in areas such as homosexual marriage, abortion, personal property rights, religion in the public square, doctor assisted suicide, euthanasia, and much more. And all of this is based on the beliefs of individual judges rather than on the will of the people in society.

As Christians, we have a particular interest in standing up and making sure that this does not continue. God has certainly sanctioned government for the purpose of maintaining order in

society. This is a very important aspect of God's work in the world. The more chaos there is in the world the more difficult it becomes for Christians to carry out the work of the Kingdom of God.

In some societies around the world, the population doesn't really have much say regarding how societal order is maintained. In American society, however, that is not the case. In our society, the government gets its permission to operate from the consent of the people. Since God has seen fit to place us in a society where the people are responsible for the operation of the government, it is a particular responsibility of Christians to exert influence in a way that allows for the work of God to be done. This does not mean that the government is supposed to do the work of the church. It is not. But it does mean that the government should be maintaining order in a way which makes it possible for the church to do God's work.

As individuals, God has made us stewards (managers) over particular resources which he has entrusted into our care. In considering this topic, the most common thought is that this has to do with such things as the money, time and abilities that we have. This is certainly true, but in our situation, we are also stewards of governmental power. As Christians it is our God given responsibility to do our part to influence government the way God wants it to go.

For some, this may mean serving in political office. But for everyone it means keeping up with current events and giving voice to God's will in society at large. We need to actively express our thoughts to our representatives and give support to those who support the rule of law. We need to oppose those who would thwart the rule of law. We must voice our opposition to legalized sin and cast our vote every chance we get. And we need to support politicians who are committed to advancing the work of God in society.

This is not to say that influencing the political arena is the most important thing we do. It is not! Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most important thing. But when chaos rules and sin becomes legalized, the real work of God is greatly hindered and people are drawn away from him rather than toward him.

The worldview we personally hold, and the one which predominates in society will have a profound effect on every part of life. It is not something which relates simply to our religious life. Because of this, it is essential that we, as Christians, understand the worldview positions which are being expressed in modern society and stand up for the one which allows God to work more effectively among us.

29. What is the Worldview Basis of Homosexual Marriage?

By Freddy Davis

Marriage amendments have just passed in three more states. Up until now, we have not seen much backlash from the militant homosexual community. But with the recent passage in Florida, California and Arizona, the militants are up in arms. In some cases the response has even turned violent.

Shortly after the election, there was an article in my local newspaper about a protest planned in Tallahassee. In the online version of the paper it is possible to respond to published articles, and with this one there was quite a lively discussion concerning the passage of the amendment. I decided to put in my two cents worth and gave a very calm and reasoned explanation as to why homosexual marriage is not good for society.

Even though I did not attack anyone, I was roundly attacked with emotional outbursts and even lies. People were deliberately misrepresenting the things I said. On top of that, they were interjecting new topics into the discussion which had nothing to do with my points in order to try and discredit the Christian viewpoint.

So, just what was going on with this? Why the emotional outburst? Why the attempt to lie about what I had said and discredit me? After all, this was supposed to be an open forum to share diverse ideas, right?

The simple answer is that the Christian position I was advocating struck a nerve with a group of people who were operating from an entirely different worldview platform. Basically, I was threatening their "religion" by expressing my point of view. A worldview position is the basis for a person's faith, even if that faith is "secular" in nature. In this case, it was not simply a matter that my beliefs were different than theirs, my disagreement was actually seen as a threat.

But there is a tricky element here. Many people who are homosexual claim that they are Christians and that they love God. They also reason that since "God made me this way," he is not upset when they live a homosexual lifestyle.

This is where our understanding of worldview becomes so critical. When we examine a worldview position, the first place we have to look is the authority source. For Christians, our authority is the Bible. Scripture clearly teaches that homosexual activity is contrary to God's intention. So, when homosexuals say that God does not object, where does that viewpoint come from? It is clearly not from the Bible. In fact, it comes directly from their own personal reasoning. By that, they have made their reasoning to be an authority equal to the Bible.

So, what worldview is represented by homosexual activists? Basically, it represents a Naturalistic point of view – the belief that there is no supernatural reality. As such, they believe that there is no one outside of the human race available to reveal a moral code, so humans have to make up their own.

Some homosexuals may claim to love God and that they are Christians. But they make that assertion based on beliefs which are outside of Christianity. They want to be included in the Christian camp and express homosexual behavior at the same time. So to justify that, they try to create a new hybrid belief that accommodates their viewpoint – one which is not purely Christian or Naturalist. It calls itself Christian but uses a Naturalistic authority source to redefine the term Christian.

If that were the only issue it would be bad enough. But this kind of thinking is not uncommon even among many in our Christian churches. Modern America has become so saturated with Naturalistic thought that many Christians do not even recognize that their faith has gone off course. It is not at all unusual to hear Christians say that they like their Christianity, but if other people want to follow another belief, that is just as valid.

This is a very charitable point of view, but it flies in the face of reality. There is a way that reality is actually structured and it is not structured in any other way. If the Bible does not express the truth about that reality, then what the homosexual activist asserts possibly could be true. But the evidence shows that Bible does represent the truth and that those trying to redefine Christianity to include acceptance of homosexual behavior are found to be separated from God.

So just how do we, as Christians, deal with this? We have to get up to speed regarding our understanding of the worldview possibilities. We need to know what we believe, what other people believe and why our faith is the truth. Armed with this knowledge, we put ourselves in a position which gives us confidence in our own faith and the tools we need to effectively share Christ with those separated from him.

So, just what are the reasons why homosexual marriage is damaging to society? There are two categories of reasoning where this plays out. There is one line of logic based on a secular approach to understanding the problem and another based on a Biblical understanding.

Secular Reasoning

Many Christians may, at first, resist the secular logic not seeing any particular reason to use this approach. After all, if God says it in the Bible that ought to be enough, right? Well perhaps so, but if we are trying to convince people who do not accept a Biblical approach we must have a different set of tools if we want to get a hearing. As the percentage of people declines who are willing to accept a purely Biblical answer, we must have a way of presenting our argument which has a different basis. Be aware, though, that even this secular argument is based on Biblical principles. It is just that it is presented in a way which uses a secular approach rather than a religious one.

The first thing that must be established is the very purpose of marriage. The purpose of marriage is not to give people rights but to create an environment where children can be raised to become healthy adults. If you examine the main arguments of the homosexual activists, you will notice that the entire topic of discussion has shifted from the that of raising a family to the denial of rights for a certain group of people.

In order for homosexual advocates to make this shift, the first thing they do is tamper with the language. The very concept of homosexual marriage requires that we change the definition of the word marriage. Marriage, by definition, requires one man and one woman. Changing the definition turns marriage into something that did not previously exist. It also shifts the purpose of marriage from raising a family to the acquisition of a set of "rights."

But marriage is not about rights. Making it about "rights" puts the focus on self-centered individuals and takes it off of the children it is meant to foster. Rather, marriage is about forming society in a way which provides stability for the social order into the future.

When the family breaks down, society breaks down. In order to have a stable family situation, and thus a stable society, children need a mom and dad living together in a committed relationship. When families do not have this arrangement, children are damaged. This is true whether the situation relates to divorced or separated parents, heterosexual cohabitation, homosexual cohabitation or single parent situations.

Unfortunately, there are some situations which have occurred in which individuals have no choice but to accept and deal with an undesirable family situation. Sometimes a parent will die or leave their spouse. But while sometimes these things happen, most bad situations result from deliberate choices people make to divorce or live together outside of marriage.

The fact is, society has a vested interest in promoting strong families. This promotion can be done in a couple of different ways. First, governments can discourage acts and lifestyles which damage the family. A second approach is that they can incentivize acts and lifestyles which promote healthy families. The benefits the state provides married heterosexual couples is a just and right means of promoting healthy families.

Christian Reasoning

While the secular reasoning is important when taking our case to society, Christians must also remember that our ultimate reason for not accepting homosexual marriage is because God has revealed to us that this goes contrary to his purpose and his plan for mankind.

When God created the world, he created it to operate in a particular way. There is a natural way that things exist and this represents the reality that God created. Those who live contrary to God's way may get away with it for a time, but will ultimately destroy themselves and others, including the next generation of children, by their rebellion against the natural order.

The structure of God's creation involves using the family as the basic platform for carrying out his plan. In addition to the ability to express the ultimate form of relationship, the family exists to produce individuals to populate God's kingdom.

In specifying the structure of the family, he specifically sanctioned marriage as the union of one man and one woman to produce this population. As such, the creation of family is an element of nature – that is, procreation is a natural, biological process. Homosexual relationships run contrary to the natural order.

Marriage certainly involves a sexual joining of a man and woman, but it goes way beyond that. It also expresses an element of the very image of God in mankind. Gender is an element of the personhood of God, but he, himself, is neither male nor female. Male and female together represent the fullness of this gender characteristic. Human beings, though, find themselves representing one gender or the other. In humanity, it is only by the joining of a man and a woman in marriage that the ultimate expression of gender, as it relates to the image of God, is able to be displayed.

Marriage, then, is such a central part of God's plan that he declared all non-married sexual unions to be contrary to his will (sin). This includes heterosexual relationships as well as homosexual.

Conclusion

The issue of homosexual marriage is not simply a matter of the rights of individuals. It involves the fulfillment of the very purpose for man's existence. A Naturalistic worldview begins by denying the existence of God and his purpose. As a result, it does not acknowledge any reason why homosexual marriage should not be advanced. A Christian worldview, on the other hand, not only acknowledges God's purposes, but provides motivation to see that it is carried out in the world.

As long as the Christian and Naturalistic worldviews exist side by side in society, there will be conflict. But Christians must be willing to strand strong for our position. The consequences of losing this battle in society is the destruction of the family. Along with this comes the destruction of many lives as the next generation suffers the consequences of a society without a foundation based on reality.

30. Worldview in Entertainment

By Freddy Davis

It goes without saying that virtually everyone loves to be entertained. Americans (and everyone else) spend literally billions (maybe even trillions) of dollars every year to be entertained. Besides individually spending money on sporting events, theater presentations, movies, television, art museums, and so on, our corporations and communities also spend big bucks to build venues of every kind where we can get our entertainment fix.

There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with being entertained, but entertainment comes in many forms and can be based on various moral beliefs. All entertainment is not created equal.

What is considered acceptable for one person may be totally unacceptable for another. And the basis for evaluating the moral virtues or wickedness of any given entertainment is our worldview foundation.

There is a worldview portrayed in every kind of entertainment that we see. In order to understand this more fully, I am going to go through the seven worldview questions and give examples of some of the ways different worldviews are expressed in them.

1. What Is the Nature of Ultimate Reality?

Ultimate reality deals with the origin and sustenance of everything in existence; is it God or nature or the life force, for instance. A Christian worldview understands the God of the Bible to express ultimate reality and is the Creator and Sustainer of everything else.

Star Wars (movie) - Star Wars represents a Far Eastern Thought belief about ultimate reality. It portrays ultimate reality as the impersonal life force. For instance, when Luke Skywalker was attacking the Death Star, he sensed the inner voice telling him, "The force is with you." He then turned off his computer in order to "feel the force" and was able to intuitively know when to drop the bomb.

Avatar (movie) - Avatar represents an Animistic belief about ultimate reality. It portrays a universe in which nature is alive with spirits that are interactive with human beings. One expression of this was when the humanoid creatures physically/spiritually connected with other creatures in order to control them.

2. What Is the Nature of Material Reality?

Material reality deals with the nature of the material universe. The Christian worldview understands the natural universe to be a temporal creation of God.

Cosmos (TV show) - Carl Sagan's TV series on PBS is a classic example of the promotion of a Naturalistic worldview. His program had a slogan that began every show that stated, "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."

3. What Is a Human Being?

This question relates to the nature of the human person. A Christian worldview asserts that human beings are persons made in the image of God but are fallen because of sin.

Planet of the Apes (Movie) - This movie is built on the Naturalistic idea that it is possible for life forms to evolve based on Darwin's theory of evolution.

4. What Happens to a Person at Death?

Worldview question number four deals with the possibility of an afterlife. The Christian worldview teaches that the human soul is eternal and will endure eternally following physical death either in or outside of the presence of God.

The Voyage Home (Star Trek Movie) - This movie expresses a mixed message about death. In order to save planet earth, the crew of the Enterprise have to travel into the past to save endangered whales. So, even though they would interact with people who were dead to their

generation, there are physical natural laws which allow for time travel – a Naturalistic conception. But the fact that life can exist objectively in a past that can be accessed by people from the future could also be an expression of a Far Eastern Thought idea that everything exists in eternity.

5. How Is it Possible to Know Anything at All?

This question deals with the nature of human knowledge. The Christian view maintains that human beings have the ability to know because we were created in the image of God who, himself, has that capability.

Bicentennial Man (Movie) - In this movie a mechanical Robot eventually turns into a human being. This reflects a concept in Naturalistic evolution which asserts that the human brain is nothing more than a biological computer. The belief is that if a mechanical computer can be created with enough computing power, it too can become self-conscious and able to reason independently.

6. How Do We Know What Is Right and Wrong?

Worldview question six deals with the issue of the source of morality. Christian worldview teaching says that right and wrong are based on the character of God who has revealed this knowledge to humanity.

Fights (*Sporting event*) - Throughout history, human beings have enjoyed "the fights." Most are done purely for fun, but there have been times when the nature of the events have reflected the values of particular worldviews. For instance, the gladiator fights in ancient Rome reflected an Animistic worldview belief that the lives of people who were not of their "group" could be destroyed and the gods not be offended. Thus, non-Romans and serious criminals could legitimately be killed in the name of sport.

In modern times, movies such as *Bloodsport* have reflected this same lack of value for human life, but based on a Far Eastern Thought foundation.

Most modern fighting events which are sanctioned by fighting organizations express a higher value for human life as they impose very strict rules about the kinds of strikes that are legal and are very quick to stop fights when someone becomes defenseless.

Pornographic movies - Those who make and view pornography have a worldview belief that there is nothing wrong with making and viewing sex acts. The worldview foundation for this can come from various places. It could be Theistic if "God" is understood to have revealed it to be okay. It could be Naturalistic as human beings are viewed only as purely physical animals and that this is "only natural."

Bones (*TV show*) - Different characters in this TV show reflect different worldview beliefs. Bones, herself, is a pure Naturalist and doesn't believe in such a thing as sexual immorality because there is no God to reveal morality. One of the lab technicians believes in a Native American Animistic approach to life. The FBI agent claims to be a Catholic Christian, but doesn't necessarily believe in traditional Christian ideas about sexual morality.

Piss Christ - (Art Display with a Crucifix in Urine) - This art exhibit was supposed to depict the contempt with which modern society views the Christian faith. The fact that it was partially paid for by the U.S. government through the National Endowment of the Arts is an illustration of how non-Christian beliefs are promoted in the public square.

7. What Is the Meaning of Human History?

This question deals with meaning in human life. A Christian worldview holds that God created the material universe to accomplish his purpose which is being carried out as history goes forward.

The Truman Show (Movie) - This was a movie in which the characters were unknowingly raised in a film studio. Their lives were a literal reality show without them knowing it. Those producing the show (in the movie) held a Naturalistic belief that human life didn't really have ultimate meaning and that those in the show could be used in this way.

Summary

We could have gone on endlessly with the examples. Literally every expression of entertainment emerges out of the worldview belief system of those who create and distribute it. Some of the forms can easily cross worldview systems (such as we saw with the "fighting events" illustration above). Others specifically demonstrate the beliefs of a particular worldview (for instance, Carl Sagan's Cosmos). By understanding the worldview belief possibilities, we can view movies, TV shows, and other kinds of entertainment in a way that allows us not to be negatively influenced by them. This knowledge also provides us an instrument of witness if we will use it that way.

In spite of the fact that non-Christian worldview beliefs are common in the entertainment arena, entertainment, itself, is a legitimate engagement that God provided to humanity. We need to employ it based on God's purposes.

And indeed, many people do. Over the years the Billy Graham organization has made movies based on a Christian worldview. Many other organizations continue this tradition today. Beyond that, many churches and other Christian organizations have sports teams and provide all kinds of other entertainment based on a Christian worldview.

As Christians, we not only need to push against the non-Christian worldview values represented in much modern entertainment, we need to be active in producing and pursuing a Christian worldview through entertainment. As we do, God will strengthen our own faith and use it in our lives to lead people to know him more fully.

Part 4 Non-Christian Worldviews

31. The Religion of Darwinism

By Freddy Davis

The Naturalist community recently celebrated what would have been the two hundredth birthday of Charles Darwin – the man who came up with the idea that biological evolution could have accounted for the existence of all life on our planet. In celebration of this event, the local university in my hometown held a series of lectures to further lionize this man. One of the lecturers was Harvard professor emeritus and a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Edward Osborne (E.O.) Wilson. In his presentation, Wilson called Darwin "the most important man who ever lived."

Pondering that comment, even superficially, ought to bring forth raucous laughter. But the fact is, he was deadly serious when he said it, and those who believe in Darwinistic evolution would agree with him wholeheartedly.

Recently I shared with you a conversation that I had on a blog with some believers in evolution who tried to defend their position (See http://badidea.wordpress.com/2008/04/06/ben-stein-continues-to-face-the-hard-questions-on-expelled-from-calvinist-minister/). I believe that the points made in that conversation were quite interesting in and of themselves. But even more enlightening is to see the Naturalists' blindness to their own worldview presuppositions and the venom spewed forth toward me for challenging their beliefs. These were not the dispassionate arguments of a scientist laying out his research findings that you would expect from university professors holding PhDs. Rather, they were the irrational sputterings of people who were determined that no one was going to challenge their faith assumptions and get away with it. One of the first things I noticed was that no one was making any distinction between micro and macro-evolution.

Micro-evolution is nothing more than what is referred to as natural selection – the small changes that occur within all life forms which allows them to adapt to their environment. This is well documented, and knowledge of this fact is even used by humans to intentionally create hybrids in both plants and animals. But the one thing that is important to understand about micro-evolution is that there is a limit to the amount of change that can take place. At a certain point, a life form cannot progress any further. I don't know of any Christian who would dispute the process of micro-evolution.

Macro-evolution, on the other hand, is the assertion that it is possible for the process of natural selection to move beyond the boundaries of micro-evolution. This is the part of the theory of evolution which claims that lower life forms can evolve to higher life forms – the molecules to man idea. Believers in Darwinistic evolution, many scientists among them, claim that there is all kinds of evidence demonstrating that this is possible. The only problem with the evidence they

point to is that the conclusions they draw from it makes absolutely no sense at all unless the presuppositions of Naturalism are, in fact, true. In other words, their interpretation of all of the evidence depends on the truth of their presuppositions. If the presuppositions are not true, Darwinistic evolution falls apart.

So, I asked one of the participants why he was not making any distinction between micro and macro-evolution in his argumentation. He stunned me with his reply. He said, "That's because there is no difference. It's exactly the same process." He shocked me further when he declared, "I'm a lifelong Christian. I start from the traditional Christian faith statement that God is the motivating force behind all creation." Without going into any detail, suffice it to say that his arguments over a several week period demonstrated that his definition of Christianity bears no relation to what is taught in the Bible. But back to the main point. None of the assertions he was making about Darwinistic evolutionary theory had any basis in science — even though he insisted that they *were* purely and absolutely based on empirical science. In actual fact, everything he put forth as an argument was based solidly and squarely on a set of faith assumptions which came straight out of Naturalism.

In order to understand the religious component of Darwinism, we must take a moment to define a couple of other terms. In addition to macro and micro evolution, Darwinists also don't distinguish between methodological and metaphysical naturalism. But it is in making this distinction that we see where science stops and religion begins.

Methodological naturalism is nothing more than another name for empirical science. It is simply, the use of the scientific method. No Christian that I know of has any problem accepting methodological naturalism. It is practiced every time a scientist goes into a lab to perform an experiment or makes other kinds of observations based on the fact that the world operates in an orderly fashion.

Metaphysical naturalism, on the other hand, is a set of faith presuppositions about the structure of reality. It has no basis whatsoever in empirical science. Specifically, metaphysical naturalism asserts that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality. Rather than use this more technical terminology, we generally just refer to metaphysical naturalism as Naturalism. But in this explanation we need to make the more technical distinction because we have to pry the two apart. The faith assumptions of metaphysical naturalism include:

- 1) The material that the physical universe is composed of is either eternal or it spontaneously emerged out of nothing (generally it is the former that is asserted),
 - 2) Life emerged out of non-life,
 - 3) Higher life forms evolved naturally from lower life forms, and
 - 4) Consciousness emerged out of non-consciousness.

Metaphysical naturalism asserts that the four beliefs above are true. There is only one problem – none of these assertions are made on the basis of empirical science. There is no empirical science that is available to prove any of these contentions. They are purely religious pronouncements.

The reason this is so critical is that Darwinists insist that a creation model for understanding origins is religion while the Darwinistic model is science. But all they have really done is to combine metaphysical and methodological naturalism and claim that they are one and the same. They do not acknowledge the distinction. In this way, they have been able to kick the creation model out of the classroom claiming it is religion and include metaphysical naturalism under the guise that it is science. Then, based on their assertion that metaphysical naturalism is the basis of

science, they go on to claim that Darwinistic evolution is the only way that science can deal with the existence of life.

If metaphysical naturalism is true, then they absolutely have a case. If it really is the truth, they can then turn around and make the claim that macro-evolutionary theory is also a fact based on science. After all, based on the presupposition that there is no such thing as a supernatural existence, what other possibility is there?

But metaphysical naturalism is not based on science. It is a religious belief. So, the evolutionary theory that is being taught in our schools as science is not based on science at all. It is based on a religious belief that God had nothing to do with the creation of life, so life had to have come about by purely natural means.

The fact is, whatever approach anyone takes in trying to understand the origin and development life forms will be based on some set of faith presuppositions. It cannot be any other way. It is also a fact that the set of presuppositions which is chosen as the basis for analyzing evidence regarding life will influence the way that the evidence is evaluated. Naturalistic presuppositions will force scientists to organize the evidence in ways which must follow the Darwinistic model. A Christian Theistic approach will influence scientists to evaluate the evidence based on a belief that God created life and that man is a special creation.

Certainly I believe the latter. And I believe that using a creation model makes more sense in understanding the evidence gathered using methodological naturalism than does the Darwinistic approach. But the point of this article is to demonstrate the religious nature of Darwinism. It is definitely a religion, not science. Based on that fact, it ought not to have priority as a presuppositional base when teaching life sciences in our schools. Also based on that, we, as Christians, ought to be much more confident in our Biblical faith as we live our lives among the religious Darwinists that we are bound to confront in daily life.

32. The Social Justice Debate

By Freddy Davis

What a fascinating fight has emerged in our society. And the really intriguing part is that currently it is being fought on the battleground of the Christian community. The issue under dispute is actually not a surprise among Christians who are actively engaged in culture war battles. But it seems to have caught the average Christian by surprise. In fact, most have not even been aware of the significance, and perhaps even the existence, of this battle until it suddenly burst forth in the public arena. This fight has to do with the topic of "social justice."

When a national talk radio personality recently made disparaging remarks about churches which promote social justice, the water hit the fan. At that point, a group of Christians reacted vehemently against him – particularly those who were associated with theologically liberal forms of Christianity. But, to be fair, there were a lot of other Christians who reacted, as well. So, why the strident reactions? Seemingly, the reasons are twofold. One reason relates to uninformed Christians who didn't realize the special meaning of the term social justice, and the other to the theologically liberal Christians for whom it has a very specific meaning.

The real problem is in the term, "social justice," itself. On the surface, this seems to be a benign reference to something that Christians are admonished to, and have been involved in, from the very beginning of the faith. Christians have always been engaged in serving and helping the poor. And when applying that kind of meaning to the term, no Christian would have any

problem with it. But for those who specifically build the practice of their faith around the term "social justice," an entirely different meaning emerges.

This term was actually coined by a Jesuit priest named Luigi Taparelli in the 1840s and came to describe a particular means of moving towards a socially just world using government mechanisms. This particular approach related to politically left, and even socialist, ideas of moving society towards social equality, and was based specifically on a Naturalistic worldview foundation.

Over the next several decades the concept of social justice was expanded to include such ideas as a living wage, human rights, economic equality through progressive taxation and the redistribution of income and property by taking from the rich and giving to the poor. In effect, it put a focus on achieving equal outcomes for all people rather than on equal opportunity. Social justice worked its way through various left leaning political, educational, and social institutions before eventually making its way to liberal churches whose theology centered around a social gospel rather than on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The interest Biblical Christians have in this topic relates to the worldview foundation that informs the two different approaches. In a Biblical worldview, it is not just the ends that matter. For Christians, it is not okay to use bad means to accomplish a good end. For instance, it is not okay to murder abortion doctors in order to prevent abortions. By the same token, the means of providing social justice is as important as the end result. You can't do the work of God using methods which run contrary to God's character.

The liberal Christian version of social justice believes that it is right to achieve social equality by taking from those who have and giving it to those who are less fortunate. In order to achieve this, they believe that using the government as the mechanism to accomplish this goal is okay. The concept is to support the transfer of wealth using high taxation of those who are productive in order to provide food, shelter and medical care to those who are not productive. In any other arena this would be called stealing. But this kind of "taking from the rich to give to the poor" is somehow justified in their minds if it is done by the government rather than by private individuals. Regardless of the mechanism, this does not come from a Christian worldview.

Another problem with this approach is that the focus is put completely on the physical as opposed to the spiritual needs of the individual. Based on a Naturalistic point of view, the physical needs of individuals are an end in themselves. This perspective, also, is not derived from a Christian worldview.

The Biblical version of social justice certainly asserts that Christians ought to do what they can to support those in need. But rather than using the government as the instrument of that help, emphasis is placed on voluntary aid given by individuals who do it because they want to. And Christians, because of their desire to follow the teachings of Christ, want to. As such, Christian believers have been instrumental throughout history in providing for and helping with education, health care, disaster relief and many other kinds of aid. And all of this is not done simply to make physical life easier for those who have less, but as a part of sharing with a lost world the love of Christ.

The Bible is very clear that the purpose of God for the people of the world is not centered in the material. In Matthew 26 we read the story of the woman who poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Immediately, the disciples became very indignant that this perfume was wasted since it could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. But Jesus, himself, fired back in defense of the woman and said, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." In saying this, Jesus was not implying that the material situation people live in

is irrelevant. But he was asserting that it is secondary to the real purpose of God – which is to know him.

Christians are admonished to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted us with. We are to use those resources to accomplish every part of God's purpose, which includes helping those in need. But in helping them, the real goal is to build the kingdom of God, not merely to provide for people's physical needs.

Ultimately the Christian expression of social justice comes down to purpose. The liberal Christian sees it as an end in itself. But the Biblical worldview asserts that it is an expression of the purpose of God in building his kingdom.

And the end result of each purpose is dramatically different. The social justice of the liberal Christian takes from one to give to another in order to make earthly life more comfortable for the one who has less. The social justice of the Biblical Christian serves God as individuals steward his resources in ways which build his eternal kingdom.

When it is defined in a way which runs contrary to a Christian worldview (which is the case in liberal Christianity), social justice does nothing to bring people into relationship with God, and actually becomes an evil means meant to promote a good end. When defined based on a Christian worldview, God uses his people to accomplish his eternal purpose using means which correspond with his very character.

33. Whatever Happened to Rev. Moon?

By Tal Davis

If you are old enough to remember the 1970s you may recall a lot of talk about Korean Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, better known as the Unification Church. You may recall seeing young men and women on street corners selling flowers, candy, or other items to support the church. You may have even had conversations with followers of Rev. Moon, who people sometimes referred to as "Moonies". Most observers, Christian and secular alike, regarded the church as a cult.

Today we don't hear much about Rev. Moon but he now is 90 years old and his church is still active. Its official name is now the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. Let's examine this bizarre counterfeit of Christianity and see what is happening with it today.

On January 6, 1920, Yong Myung Moon was born in northern Korea. He was the second oldest of eight children in a family that in 1930 converted to Christianity and joined a Korean Presbyterian Church. On Easter Sunday in 1936, as a sixteen year old boy, Yong Moon claims he saw a vision of Jesus Christ after which he changed his name to Sun Myung Moon (Sun "Shining" Moon). During this period of his life Moon says he was spiritually tested and imprisoned during the Japanese military occupation of Korea. In 1939 he was sent to Japan to study where, according to his account, he was again arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for anti-Japanese activities.

After World War II Moon was released and returned to Korea boldly preaching a set of unusual new doctrines. In 1946 he was charged with sexual immorality and heresy. As a result he was expelled from the Korean Presbyterian Church. In 1948 North Korean communists arrested Moon a third time. He was liberated in 1950 by allied forces during the Korean War and headed south. He then moved to Seoul where he established his ministry's headquarters.

The following year Moon was divorced by his first wife who charged him with cruelty. Later that same year a prominent Korean, Hyo Won Eu, converted to Moon's doctrine and began working with him to write The Divine Principle, a compilation of Moon's doctrines. It was completed in 1952. On May 1, 1954, Moon's church, "The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity," or Unification Church (UC), was formally established with Hyo Won Eu as its first President.

On April 11, 1960, Moon married Hak Ja Han, in what the UC refers to as the "Marriage of the Lamb." That historic event, they assert, established what they call "The True Family." During the 1960s, the movement gained converts in Korea, Japan, and several other Asian countries.

Moon came to the United States in 1970 where he purchased several large estates and businesses in New York. He then toured the country preaching in rented auditoriums to large crowds. Several thousand Americans may have joined the church during that period. This sudden visibility and apparent growth raised the media's, and the country's, general awareness of the UC, Moon, and other similar cults. Many parents and other family members of converts complained that their love ones were being manipulated and estranged by intense UC indoctrination processes. As well, a number of UC defectors told stories of psychological, spiritual, and labor abuse by UC leaders.

In 1982 Moon was charged and convicted of tax evasion and spent eighteen months in United States federal prison. That same year he founded what has become perhaps his most successful enterprise in the United States, The Washington Times newspaper. It is now widely recognized by many Americans as a conservative alternative to the older and more widely circulated Washington Post. The president of the paper's corporation and many of its staff are members of the UC.

In 1988 Moon endured one of several tragedies in his family when one of his sons died in a car crash at age 17. Moon later claimed that a young African member of his church had been possessed by his son's spirit and was thereafter regarded virtually as an honored member of Moon's family.

Another family crisis occurred in 1997. Nansook Hong, the wife of Moon's oldest son, divorced her husband, cut all ties with the UC and wrote a scathing expose book about Moon, his family, and their royally opulent lifestyle. The book alleged that Moon was guilty of sexual infidelity, family abuse, and that several of his children, including her ex-husband, were deeply involved with illegal drugs.

In 1999, tragedy struck again when another of Moon's sons, Younjin Phillip Moon, committed suicide at age 21. This event, and the other difficulties Moon has experienced in his family, conflicts sharply with the UC doctrine that his "True Family" is the model for all people and that his children would reinstitute a pure and perfect godly line of humanity.

As mentioned earlier, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Moon became more candid about his self-proclaimed Messiahship. This culminated on March 23, 2004 when Moon and his wife were crowned by the UC as the world's "Savior, Messiah, Returning Lord and True Parents." This title was bestowed on them at the "Ambassadors Peace Awards" banquet held in the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, DC. Incredibly, the affair was attended by several members of Congress and a few local DC church leaders.

In March of 2008, Moon's oldest son, Hyo Jin Moon died of a heart attack at age 45 in Korea. The next month, Moon's youngest son, Hyung Jin Moon, now 34, officially took over leadership of the Unification Church from his father.

Beliefs of the Unification Church Authority

The doctrinal beliefs of the UC are a complicated mixture of Eastern philosophy, Christian and biblical terminology, and the many bizarre notions and interpretations of Rev. Moon and other UC leaders. The primary tenets of official UC teaching are contained in several books, the most important being Divine Principle and Master Speaks, a collection of Moon's sermons. Other recent messages by Moon are also regarded as authoritative.

The Bible is referenced only to justify UC doctrines. Bible scholars, however, are in universal agreement that Moon's revelations and the church's theological teachings contradict clear biblical teachings. Also, Moon's checkered personal history militates against the audacious claims he makes for himself.

A New Philosophy of History

The Unification Church teaches all world history should be understood in context of a sort of cosmic dualism. This dualism is called the "Give and Take Action" of creation. It consists basically of a series of universal polar opposites: positive/negative, active/passive, direct/indirect, objective/subjective, masculine/feminine. This concept is very similar to the Yin-Yang dualism of Taoism, a popular belief system in Korea that was likely the source of Moon's worldview and historical musings.

God, according to the UC concept, is described as the "Universal Prime Energy" who (or which) constantly interacts with the universe in this philosophical system. This interaction is realized practically in what Moon called the "Four Fold Foundation" of human history. This notion asserts that all creation had its origin in God, the Universal Prime Energy, who then made a division in his creation by making Adam (masculine) and Eve (feminine) according to the "give and take action" principle described above. Out of this division would be a sexual union which would produce a divine bloodline of pure perfect children. Thus the God-Adam-Eve-child union would complete the four fold foundation which would thereafter be reproduced through their offspring in all of humanity.

However, according to UC doctrine, before Adam and Eve could produce their perfect offspring, the serpent deceived Eve. The serpent, according to their interpretation of Genesis 3, is symbolic for Satan who seduced Eve sexually and thus produced an evil, satanically sired, human bloodline through Cain.

Later, Eve had Abel with Adam, who represents a godly line. World history, therefore, is a cosmic struggle of good (God) and evil (Satan). In the last century this struggle was manifest in the final world conflict of democracy versus communism. According to Moon, the culmination of this final conflict, appropriately, was waged in his homeland of Korea.

Jesus: The Lord Who Failed

The UC teaches that, because of the corruption of the human race, it was necessary for God to send a redeemer to restore the human race to its proper state. Jesus was thus sent to "pay indemnity" (suffer) to redeem mankind from spiritual death and to restore the pure godly bloodline of humanity. The UC maintains that Jesus accomplished only the first phase (spiritual redemption) of this mission. He failed to accomplish the second phase (physical redemption) because he was crucified before he could marry and produce children. Therefore, another redeemer would need to come about 2000 years later to finish the divine mission.

Christian Response: The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was the unique incarnate Son of God and he accomplished his mission in its totality. His death and resurrection provided full atonement for mankind. Therefore, He procured absolute salvation from the effects of sin and death, in both the spiritual and physical realms (see: 1 Cor. 15:1-28; Col. 1:19-22).

Lord of the "Second Advent"

According to the UC's strange interpretation of Revelation 7: 2-4 and other biblical passages, the second redeemer had to be born in the Far East around the year 1920. Like Jesus, he would necessarily suffer greatly for mankind ("pay indemnity"). However, unlike Jesus, he would not die violently, but rather would live a long life, marry a perfect mate, and produce perfect children. Together they would complete the fourfold foundation and form the perfect or "True Family."

For years Moon avoided claiming publicly to be this new Messiah/redeemer. Nonetheless, UC literature and Moon's sermons all pointed in his direction. UC members unapologetically referred to Moon and his wife as "Father and Mother." In the 1990's, however, Moon became more brazen in his public claims to be the "Lord of the Second Advent."

Christian Response: Moon's claims to Messiahship are blasphemous. Jesus alone can support His claims to deity and Messiahship by His sinless life, death, and resurrection. There is simply no need for another Messiah. (see John 1:1-18; 8:56-59; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:13-22; Heb. 1:3; 13:8).

Completed Testament Age

In 1999, it was reported that Moon, by revelation, had received communications from the spirit world indicating that, because of his successful ministry, we are now entering into the "Completed Testament" age of world history. Good (democracy) is now finally triumphing over evil (communism). Moon, in essence, took credit for the fall of Soviet communism and the increases in the number of democratic countries in the early 1990s. As a result, he asserts, peace will soon cover the world, war will cease, and all religions will unite under a single authority (Moon's, of course).

Christian Response: The Bible teaches, however, that full peace and tranquility will come only at the return of Christ Himself. Moon's claim that we are entering an era of world peace and freedom because of his ministry is ludicrous. If that is true, how does he and the UC explain the rise of militant Islam, terrorist attacks (such as that of September 11, 2001), and the various wars still raging around the world? Furthermore, North Korea remains a staunchly Stalinist communist dictatorship that is even now seeking to develop nuclear weapons.

Join the True Family

According to UC doctrine, all people may receive the benefits of Moon's Messiahship by being grafted on to his True Family. This divine adoption process is accomplished primarily by joining Moon's church, pledging total obedience to him, and entering into a marriage relationship blessed by Moon to a mate personally selected by him. Through the years, Moon has conducted numerous mass weddings in various parts of the world with thousands of couples taking their vows before him. In most cases, the brides and grooms were not even acquainted until shortly before the wedding ceremonies.

A disturbing sidelight to this practice is that, in recent years, some American Christian ministers and their wives have participated in these ceremonies to "reaffirm their wedding

vows." They may have done so unwittingly, not understanding the true significance of the UC rituals since the ceremonies are performed by Moon in the Korean language. One ritual includes the men and women drinking from a common cup of wine containing a drop of Moon's blood.

Christian Response: Moon's system of physical salvation by joining his True Family is totally unbiblical. The Bible teaches that complete salvation is available by grace to any person who will repent of his sin and, by faith, turn to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior (see: Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10). Marriage, though an important human relationship ordained by God, has no place in the salvation process.

Moreover, it demonstrates a serious lack of spiritual discernment for Christians to participate in Moon's wedding events. They should not support Moon and his idolatrous movement in any way. Christian ministers, especially, should not only avoid associating with the UC or Moon, but publicly should rebuke his blasphemous claims and unbiblical doctrines.

The UC Today

In North America there have never been more than about 10,000 members of the Unification Church. Nonetheless, the church exerts a level of public influence of greater proportion than its numbers would seem to indicate. Moon and his church have accumulated millions of dollars as a result of various fundraising campaigns by UC members. The church also has controlling interest in a wide ranging number of business ventures worldwide. In the United States, as mentioned before, the church owns The Washington Times newspaper. Its growing media empire also includes the United Press International wire service and Insight Online internet magazine.

In the education field, the UC appoints a majority of the board of trustees of the University of Bridgeport (Connecticut). The UC bailed the school out financially in 1981 when it was facing imminent bankruptcy and closure. Its President is Neil Salonen, a former President of the UC branch in America.

The church also sponsors dozens of other affiliated organizations that seek to further its spiritual and political goals. Here is a list of some of them:

Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP)

The Professors World Peace Academy

CAUSA International

The National Council for the Church and Social Action (NCCSA)

The Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)

American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC)

Free Teens USA

The Future of the Unification Church

As mentioned, Rev. Moon is now in his 90s, so the chances he will live much longer are slim. In any case he has placed control of his church and empire into the hands of his youngest son and one of his daughters. How they will steer the movement after Moon is gone is anyone's guess. However, as is often true with other cults when the main leader dies, the UC may splinter as various factions (perhaps led by other of his children) claim his authority as true successors. Possibly, the UC will seek public recognition and acceptance as a Christian denomination. It is unlikely, however, that it will renounce its attachment to Moon as messiah and reform its theology to conform to orthodox and biblical Christianity.

Suggestions for Witnessing to Unificationists

First of all, treat your UC friend with respect and dignity. Most members of the UC are sincere, but misguided, followers of Moon and his doctrine. Do not refer to them as "Moonies."

Be careful not to belittle Moon or demean his work, but explain to your UC friend why you cannot accept Moon or his church as authentic. Focus your discussion on the person and finished work of Jesus Christ. Explain why you regard Jesus as the only Messiah who accomplished full salvation for mankind, by His death and resurrection, and that here was no need for another.

Show them how UC doctrine contradicts the Bible. UC members are taught that their interpretations of the Bible are correct and that other faiths have misunderstood its real meaning. For example, the UC's contention that Eve was seduced sexually by the serpent simply has no biblical foundation. It is either a result of extra-biblical revelation or a gross example of speculative interpretation.

Be aware that convincing a UC member to exit the group and accept Christ is very difficult. The most important principles are to build personal relationships when possible, show patience and love, and pray for UC members.

Christians also need to be alert for people wishing to exit the movement. Many disillusioned UC members over the years have left the church. If you know UC people in your community listen for those who may want to exit and be willing to help them however you can.

34. Animism in Today's World

By Freddy Davis

So, you think Animism is only found in primitive societies or in pockets of small uneducated people groups in more advanced societies? Think again. How about these recent headlines on the world stage.

Kyrzyg Palriment Expells "Evil Spirits" UN Prepares to Debate Whether "Mother Earth" Deserves Human Rights Status

In the first article, Kyrgyzstan's parliament sacrificed seven sheep in a traditional religious ceremony in order to drive evil spirits out of the parliament chamber. This is that country's national legislative assembly.

In the second article, the United Nations decided to devote an entire day debating the rights of "Mother Earth." There is a group of governments which want to grant the same rights found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to Mother Nature. If passed, this would establish a legal system to maintain balance between human rights and the inalienable rights of other members of the Earth community (plants, animals, terrain).

All of this may seem way out in left field for most of us, but we live in a world where Animistic worldview beliefs have a significant amount of backing. We might look at a country like Kyrgyzstan and dismiss them as a backward third world country whose people are too ignorant to know better. But these same kinds of beliefs are being promoted at the UN, of all places. And the major countries supporting this include Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua, Barbuda, and Syria, plus 11 more countries. Indeed, Animism is spreading, and its spread is far reaching.

What is Animism?

Animism is one of the four foundational worldviews. This is the one that affirms the belief that there are many gods in the universe and that they interact with humanity in a symbiotic relationship. Typically, the gods are understood to be expressed in the natural world – some in material objects, some in heavenly objects, some in animals and others being the spirits of departed human ancestors.

Most Animists affirm that human beings are spiritual at their core and that upon physical death, they, too, will become spirits in the spirit world. They believe that it is their duty to do what they can in this life to make sure that the needs of the spirits are met.

Animists generally believe that the ultimate goal of life is to achieve as much peace and prosperity out of this life as possible and to promote harmony between the material and spirit worlds. The way they go after this is to do all they can to appease the gods who are able to affect their earthy lives. They do this by learning what makes the gods happy, and performing the deeds to accomplish it.

Why Christians Need to Be Familiar with Animism

It is estimated that 40% of the world's population is Animistic. It used to be that various forms of Animism were not at all prominent in America. That is simply not true anymore. Accurate numbers are hard to come by, but the number of people looking to some form of Animism is rising dramatically.

There are, perhaps, tens of millions of Americans who at least give a nod to Animistic practice, even if they claim another religion. Those who check their horoscopes or call on a palm reader or other soothsayer are looking to Animistic practice for life's answers. And a couple of the most popular movies of all time have Animistic foundations – The Lion King and Avatar.

But the numbers of people who overtly follow an Animistic religion are also rising. In 2007 the US military counted just under 2000 service members who list their religion as Wicca, and they have even approved an official military grave marker with the Wiccan insignia. Other belief systems which are overtly Animistic or have significant elements of Animism incorporated within them include New Age, Voodoo, Native American religions, Astrology and Fortune Telling. Combine Wiccans with other Animistic belief systems together and estimates of their numbers in the US range between 600,000 and 800,000 people.

In comparative terms, this may not seem like a large number. But it does represent a significant rise in the last several decades and growth rates seem to be rising. What this means is that Christians in America are more and more likely to interact with people who claim an Animistic belief.

It is not merely for interests sake that Christians ought to be active in learning more about Animistic practice. We have been called by God to be witnesses to those who don't know Christ, and to do that we must be familiar with what they believe. It used to be that American Christians didn't have much need to learn about Animists. That has all changed.

How to Witness to Animists

The starting place for witness to someone who holds an Animistic worldview is to bring them to the possibility of the existence of only one God. Animistic belief recognizes divinity in all of the created order – material objects, heavenly objects, animals and departed human spirits.

Animistic belief really doesn't have much to support its claims – primarily only anecdotal evidence. Any particular Animistic belief system cannot even provide a reason why its own system is better than some other Animistic system. There simply is no means of arbitrating between them. The basis for belief is simply based on the assertions of its adherents.

Once you are able to create doubt within the person due to the fact that they cannot give any reason why their faith might be the truth, an opening has been created which could lead to an opportunity to share the gospel message. In doing this, you must start with a thorough explanation of the God of the Bible. They must understand the distinction between their belief in many gods and the One God of the Bible.

Once they understand who God is, you may then proceed to the condition of mankind as fallen, as well as the problem created by the fall regarding our separation from him. Finally, you can explain salvation by sharing how God provided a solution to the separation problem and the steps they can take to receive Christ.

Summary

To be effective in your sharing, though, you will have to do your due diligence. You must make the effort to learn about the basic foundation of Animism as well as the particular belief system of the person you are interacting with. It is very difficult to carry on an intelligent conversation about something you don't know much about.

Worldwide, Animism is actually quite large. In America, not so much, but definitely growing. As such, it is essential that Christians learn the key elements of Animism so that we can be faithful in sharing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

35. Worldview in Avatar

By Freddy Davis

I just went to see the new movie Avatar. WOW! I must say, this is one of the most fascinating and intriguing movies I have ever seen. The 3D technology and computer graphics make this very realistic in almost every way. It is a colorful and beautiful fantasyland come to life. In spite of a certain amount of violence, bad language and sexuality which enter at points in the movie, you will be blown away. Plot and worldview perspective aside, this movie will leave you with vivid visions and feelings that will carry you along for a while.

Those characteristics are both the good news and the bad news about this movie. As a visual experience it is very powerful and impacting. You will be entertained and, if you are like me, be left with strong feelings of wonder. On the negative side, you will also likely be drawn into a worldview perspective which is anything but Biblical.

This is, perhaps, one of the most powerful visual interpretations of an Animistic worldview that I have ever witnessed. Here, you have a realistic, animated (not an oxymoron in this movie) portrayal of a living nature in which humans, animals and plants all interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship. The real and the animation are so completely intertwined that you will need to pay close attention to keep them separated in your mind.

I am not one to discourage people from seeing movies like this, but I will throw in one caveat. Do it with your eyes wide open. Be sure you understand the difference between fantasy and reality, the difference between the Christian and Animistic worldviews and the objective reality of the God of the Bible.

What is going to happen with this movie is that people who don't know how to make those distinctions will simply absorb this Animistic belief system as a part of their own without realizing they are doing it. There will be people who simply accept that an impersonal life energy courses through the earth and that humanity participates in that with nature. They will simply accept that there is something innately bad about technological, scientific and societal development, and that a living nature must not be violated. This is inevitable with people who do not consciously understand the various worldview possibilities and how to evaluate them.

The worldview that is pictured in Avatar is not real. Nature is not a living entity in the way that is pictured in this movie. Man does not have the kind of integral and interactive connection with nature in the way that this film depicts. There is no such thing as an idyllic primitive culture as portrayed in this movie. In the real world, societies in these circumstances live very harsh lives with virtually no prospect of improvement for themselves or their children. They have very high infant mortality rates and are in constant danger from illness and natural calamity as well as human and animal predators. The image presented in the movie is, literally, a fairy tale fantasy.

As Christians there is nothing particularly evil about watching a movie like this. The creative use of our imaginations is a gift of God by virtue of the fact that we were created in his image. After all, look at some of the real creatures in nature that God created. Nothing in any fantasy film goes beyond some of those. It is critical, however, that we understand the worldview perspective that we are seeing. There is a way that reality is organized and it is not organized in any other way. The revelation that God has given us in the Bible depicts a reality in which a transcendent God exists who has a particular character. It also teaches that God created the material universe in a particular form and that he sustains that universe by his own power. We are also taught that God created mankind to be a special creature, made in his image, who is different from the other animal creatures in his creation – able to have a personal relationship with him through his provision of forgiveness of sin by the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The essential understanding that we must come to is that the Biblical teaching is the objective, literal truth about the way reality is structured. It is a very different understanding than what we see in Avatar. And when we watch a movie like this, we must recognize that it is pure fantasy – not just the story line, but the worldview being depicted, as well.

Because of the fact that we live in a world where technology gives us entertainment which is capable of implanting powerful worldview impressions into our lives without us even realizing it, we Christians must make the effort to learn how to understand how it affects people. I, personally, suggest that you take advantage of the opportunity to see this movie. And as you watch it, it is permissible to enjoy the power of the technology. At the same time, you must be aware of the worldviews that are being advocated and contemplate consciously why the Animistic worldview cannot be true.

This is important not only for yourself. Because of the blockbuster nature of this film, you are bound to interact with other people who will take the worldview beliefs advocated in the movie as truth. This could very well be your children and grandchildren as well as friends and colleagues. If you understand what is going on, a discussion of this movie could be an opportunity to share the real truth about God and how he, and he alone, provides eternal life in Jesus Christ.

There is a way that reality is actually structured and it is the way that is described in the Bible. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn about worldview and to fully grasp the evidence that

confirms the truth of the Christian worldview. With this knowledge, God will be able to work in and through your life as never before.

36. Harold Camping, the End of the World, and the Investigative Judgment By Tal Davis

I was wandering through a small Christian bookstore when I came to a shelf labeled "Prophecy." One title jumped out at me; it was simply 1994 by Harold Camping. I pulled it off the shelf and browsed through it. Apparently, Camping, based on his study of Bible dates, was predicting that the end of the world and the rapture of the church were going to occur in September of 1994. As I stood there, I immediately realized one major problem with his prediction; it was already January of 1995! I took the book to the owner of the store and gently suggested he remove it from his stacks. He looked at it, nodded, and thanked me.

This same Harold Camping (B. 1921) was back again with a new prediction – the rapture was going to happen on May 21st of this year. Well, if you are reading this article, you know that he was wrong again (unless you didn't get raptured on Saturday – in that case, see you later). Camping is only one in a long list of those who have made the audacious claim to know when Armageddon was going to occur or when the Lord was going to return. In 1988 a man named Edgar Whisenant (1932-2001) wrote a book titled 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988. When that date failed he changed it to 1989. The Jehovah's Witnesses have posted numerous dates for Armageddon, the last being 1975.

Perhaps the most famous end of the world prognosticator was a Massachusetts Baptist minister named William Miller (1782-1849). He boldly predicted that the return of Christ would be in 1843 or 1844. He based his prediction on his interpretation of Daniel 8:14: "And he said unto me, 'Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed'." Miller interpreted the 2300 days as meaning 2300 years. He asserted that the 2300 year countdown began in 457 BC with the decree of Persian King Artaxerxes to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. So he figured 2300 years from 457 BC would equal AD 1843. He changed it to 1844 when he realized the math didn't work, given there was no year zero. He eventually pin pointed the date to October 22, 1844.

Many people took Millers' prediction seriously, some selling their homes and belongings to wait for the end. Legend has it that some people put on white robes and stood in corn fields waiting for the rapture. On October 23 Miller and his followers were badly embarrassed, to say the least. The failure of the prediction led to what became known as the "Great Disappointment." To his credit, Miller later apologized for misleading so many people.

Not all of Miller's followers, however, were so easily convinced of the error. Two of his followers, Hiram Edson and O.R.L. Crosier, both decided that Miller's date was right, but it was the event he got wrong. They came to the conclusion that the date of 1844 was not when Christ was to return to earth, but rather, when He began to cleanse the Holy Sanctuary in Heaven. They reasoned that the earthly temple's holy of holies sanctuary was a type of what existed in Heaven. So, on October 22, 1844, Jesus entered the heavenly Sanctuary to initiate what they called the "Investigative judgment." This they said was the second and final phase of Jesus' atoning ministry which had begun with his crucifixion.

Another of Miller's devotees at that time was a young woman named Ellen Gould Harmon (1827-1915). Young Ellen embraced the conclusions of Edson and Crosier and claimed she

received heavenly visions confirming their interpretations. One man who was convinced of the authenticity of Ellen's visions was James White, whom she married in 1846. Together they established the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA), which combined Edson's and Crosier's Sanctuary doctrine with the Seventh-day Sabbath teachings of Captain Joseph Bates (1792-1872) and other unusual ideas.

Today, the teachings and biblical interpretations of Ellen G. White are the foundations for the SDA Church. It is one of the fastest growing churches in the world. And though they no longer attempt to set dates for the return of Christ, they still hold to the Investigative Judgment doctrine whose timing came from the faulty biblical teachings of William Miller. I sincerely hope no one will try to take Harold Camping's date setting in the same way. Christians should restrain from ever setting dates for Jesus' return. As He himself said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone (Matthew 24: 36)."

37. The Hidden Cult of Oneness PentecostalismBy Tal Davis

Recently a well-known pastor, television preacher, and best-selling author was asked about his beliefs about God. He coyly answered that he believed in one God who manifests himself in three ways: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. He said that God the Father was the One True God of the Old Testament. He became a man as the Son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus ascended he sent the Holy Ghost to empower the church. He stated clearly that he believes in only one God – not three.

Now most Christians would read his statement and assume he believes in the traditional Christian doctrine of the eternal Holy Trinity – One God in Three Persons. But that was not what he said. He said he believes in one God who manifests himself at different times in different ways: first as Father, second as Son; and third as Holy Ghost. This is actually representative of an ancient heresy known as Modalism (also called Sabellianism). It said there is only one God who appears at different times in different modes of existence. It is the official doctrine of God of several groups of churches who are usually called the Oneness Pentecostals. They are also known by other names such as the "Jesus Only" churches, "Apostolic Pentecostals," The "Oneness Movement" and the "Jesus Name" Movement. These are what I call "the hidden cult of Oneness Pentecostalism."

History of the Oneness Movement

The modern Pentecostal movement is generally regarded to have begun in 1901 in a chapel prayer meeting in Topeka, Kan., led by Charles Parham, a teacher at Bethel Bible College. A few years later, in 1906, the Pentecostal experience of "speaking in tongues" burst on the scene during a revival in an African-American Baptist church on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, Calif. Following these beginnings, Pentecostal preachers and churches spread rapidly, coalescing into various denominations and factions.

In 1913, one popular teacher, R.E. McAlister of Toronto, Ont., began teaching that the Trinity doctrine was untrue and that baptism should be done correctly in Jesus' name only – not in the traditional Trinitarian formula. Other preachers, such as Frank J. Ewart and John G. Scheppe, joined McAlister in his non-Trinitarian perspective.

By 1916, "oneness" views were being expounded by some ministers in the Assemblies of God (AOG), a then new Pentecostal denomination. These were strongly rejected by the denomination's council that year, and the AOG, to its credit, adopted a strong Trinitarian stance in its statement of faith. Nonetheless, more than 160 Oneness ministers who were expelled from the AOG quickly formed their own alliances to promote their heretical doctrines.

Eventually, a number of oneness sects formed, most of which were predominately African-American. The largest Oneness movements today are the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW). The UPCI was organized in 1945 with the union of two predominately white groups started earlier in the century. The PAW formed in 1918 but split along racial lines in 1924. Today it is predominately African-American and is headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In our current time, Oneness groups have a number official names. Here is a list of the largest and their reported (their own estimates) memberships.

Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God (AOHCG) - 13,000

Assemblies of the Lord Jesus, Inc. (ALJI) - 50,000

Bible Way Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ World Wide, Inc. (Bible Way) - 250,000

Church of Our Lord Jesus of the Apostolic Faith (COLJF) - 30,000

Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) - 1,000,000 reported

Pentecostal Church of Apostolic Faith (PCAF) - 25,000

United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) (UCJC-A) - 100,000

United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI) - 500,000 (1.5 million worldwide)

Doctrinal Beliefs

Oneness Pentecostal Sources of Authority

Oneness Pentecostals, of all branches, affirm the authority of the Bible for doctrine. Many of the Oneness doctrines, however, are derived from the King James Version used to proof text their unique doctrines. It is also common for Oneness ministers to claim revelations from God that are regarded by their followers as inspired.

Evangelical Christians regard the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). It is the final authority for the Christian on all matters of faith and doctrine. No single translation or human interpretation can be regarded as infallible. All modern writings or "revelations" must be analyzed in light of sound principles of biblical interpretation.

There is Only One God

Oneness Pentecostals declare that the Godhead consists of only one Person and deny the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. They maintain that the only real "person" in the Godhead is Jesus. Thus, they are often referred to as the "Jesus Only" Movement. They maintain that God exists in two modes, as the Father in heaven and as Jesus the Son on earth. Nevertheless, they are the same person, not two separate persons. The Holy Spirit is not regarded as a person at all, merely a manifestation of Jesus' power or a synonym for Him. Several verses are quoted to establish this view such as Colossians 2:9 (NKJV), "For in Him (Jesus) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Oneness theologians would argue that if the Father and the Son were separate, then the Godhead could not fully dwell in Christ. They also look to Matthew 28:19 to affirm their views that Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize in the "name" (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is said to have two natures: human and divine. Thus, when He died, only His human nature died. Also, when Jesus prayed, it was His human nature praying to His divine nature – not to a separate Father in heaven. As mentioned, the Oneness Pentecostal view of God is similar to the ancient heresy of Modalism. Modalism is the belief that one God existed in time in three distinct modes of being: first as the Father in heaven; second, bodily as the Son on earth; and finally as the Holy Spirit.

The Bible indeed teaches the existence of only one God (Deut. 6:4). Nonetheless, historic Christianity maintains that the doctrine of the Trinity (or tri-unity of God) is taught in Scripture. The Bible teaches that the one God exists eternally in three separate and distinct persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Colossians 2:9 does not teach that the totality of the Godhead was in the body of Jesus, but rather that Jesus embodied the totality of the divine nature and God is totally revealed in Him. If the Father and the Son are the same person, then the Oneness teachers have a difficult job explaining how the Father and the Son can love each other (See Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 3:35; 5:20; 2 Pet. 1:17), talk to each other (see John 11:41-42; 12:28; 17:1-26), and know each other (see Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 7:29).

Matthew 28:19 clearly reflects the Trinitarian concept that the "name" (authority and characteristics) of the one God is incorporated in the three Persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2). (See the following verses affirming the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit: Luke 12:12; John 15:26; Acts 5:3-10; 13:2-4; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 3:7.)

Salvation

The Oneness Pentecostal movements generally teach that to receive and maintain salvation, a person must adhere to four essential requirements.

- 1. A person must have faith in Jesus Only. Oneness teachers would agree that salvation requires putting one's full faith in the Jesus of Oneness doctrine. That is, the Jesus who is the totality of the Godhead, who died on the cross as make atonement for sin, and who rose again from the dead.
- 2. A person must repent and be baptized by immersion in the "Name of Jesus." Acts 2:38 is used as evidence that the early church baptized only in the name of Jesus. They maintain that baptism in the Trinitarian formula is invalid since it implies belief in three gods. They claim Matthew 28:19 is not to be taken as a command to baptize in that formula.
- 3. A person must speak in tongues. Like most traditional Pentecostals and Charismatics, Oneness Pentecostals teach that speaking in tongues is a gift to be exercised today. However, unlike most traditionalists, the Oneness movements maintain that speaking in tongues is not just a post-conversion indicator of the filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, but an essential ingredient in the salvation experience itself. In other words, if a person has never spoken in tongues, he or she is not saved!
- 4. A person must abide by strict and legalistic standards of holiness. Most Oneness Pentecostals teach that once salvation is gained initially by the preceding ingredients, it must be maintained by daily adherence to legalistic codes of personal behavior. Alcohol and tobacco are prohibited. Women are not allowed to cut their hair, wear short dresses or slacks, use make-up, or wear jewelry. Men are expected to dress conservatively (white shirts and dark slacks), be clean shaven, and have short haircuts. Violations of these codes may result in a loss of salvation and exclusion from church fellowship.

Some small Oneness groups also practice handling poisonous snakes or drinking poison to demonstrate their faith and holiness based on Mark 16:18 in the King James Version.

Evangelical Christians maintain that salvation is "by grace through faith" in Jesus Christ alone (see Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Baptism is not essential to one's reception of salvation. It is a symbol of one's identification with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:38 must be read in context and in light of Jesus' clear command in Matthew 28:19.

Speaking in tongues (glossolalia), like all other spiritual gifts, is distributed sovereignly by the Holy Spirit to those He wills for the equipping and edification of the whole body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12-14). There is no indication that it, or any other spiritual gift, is required to receive God's gift of salvation by grace or to be filled with His Holy Spirit (see Eph. 5:18).

Oneness movements' emphases on personal holiness and healthy lifestyles are commendable. Nevertheless, the requirements for outward adherence to a strict moral code in order to maintain salvation inevitably leads to legalism and a lack of assurance of eternal life.

No amount of good works, moral living, or church membership guarantees salvation. Salvation is entirely based on grace through faith in Christ. Good works and holy living are the natural responses of salvation already received – not its cause (see Eph. 2:10). Salvation is eternally assured for those who have accepted Christ as personal Lord and Savior (see John 1:12; 5:24; 1 John 5:13).

Mark 16:18 is part of a disputed portion of Mark's text. Regardless, handling snakes or drinking poison is a misuse of that Scripture and has resulted in the deaths of many practitioners.

Conclusions

It is troubling to know that one famous and influential American pastor has so easily disguised his doctrinal errors, even to the point of being invited to speak at Christian conferences and in evangelical churches. The truth is, Oneness Pentecostals have an anti-Trinitarian view of God, an unbiblical doctrine of Jesus Christ, and unbiblical requirements for salvation (speaking in tongues, water baptism in "Jesus' name," and a legalistic moral code). Thus, those churches or preachers adhering to its basic doctrines cannot be regarded as authentically Christian. Any group or church that claims to be Christian yet deviates at any point from historical Christian faith is, by definition, a cult. Oneness Pentecostal churches are, therefore, cultic in nature and outside the theological parameters of historic Christianity.

Witnessing to Oneness Pentecostals

- 1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible. Know what you believe And why you believe it. Develop a sharp sense of discernment so that you can recognize unbiblical teaching when you are faced with it.
- 2. Acquire a basic knowledge of Oneness Pentecostals' beliefs and practices. This article has presented a basic overview of Oneness doctrine. Study it and other resources that explain that movement's errors.
- 3. Seek to build a personal and respectful relationship with the Oneness Pentecostal. If you know someone who is a part of one of these groups, take time to be friend them. Pray that God may give you opportunities to share Christ and his liberating (from legalism) love with them.
- 4. Focus the discussion on the essential elements of the Christian faith. Do not get sidetracked defending your denomination. The only real issues are who is God, who is Jesus, and what is the way of salvation. Everything else is secondary.

- 5. Be prepared to cite (in context) and explain specific biblical passages supporting Christian doctrines, particularly the biblical basis for the Trinity, the historic understanding of the nature and work of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith.
- 6. Share your personal testimony of God's grace and your faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.
- 7. The Oneness Pentecostal may try to convince you that you need to speak in tongues, be baptized in Jesus' name, and live according to their strict moral code. Be prepared to explain biblically why you do not believe these are necessary ingredients for salvation or eternal security.
- 8. Present the basic plan of salvation and encourage the Oneness Pentecostal to receive Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior.
 - 9. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you as you share.

Resources

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Scripture quotation marked NKJV is from The New King James Version. Copyright 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

38. The Jehovah's Witnesses Bible: Is It Reliable? By Tal Davis

"All scripture is inspired of God." These words of 2 Timothy 3:16 identify God, whose name is Jehovah, as the Author and Inspirer of the Holy Scriptures. How satisfyingly delightful the inspired Scriptures are! What an amazing fund of true knowledge they provide! They are indeed 'the very knowledge of God' that has been sought after and treasured by lovers of righteousness in all ages-Proverbs 2:5." (All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial, 7).

The above statement comes from a textbook written by anonymous authors of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS), the official corporation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Most evangelical Christians would find little or nothing to dispute about it. Indeed, Christians historically have affirmed the full inspiration and authority of the 66 books comprising the Protestant Bible.

The WBTS concurs: "The sacred Scriptures, as a collection from Genesis to Revelation, form one complete Book, one complete library, all inspired by the one supreme Author...The sixty-six Bible books, all together, form the one library of the Holy Scriptures" (All Scripture, 11).

Evangelical Christians furthermore affirm the Bible as the authority for believers in all matters of faith and practice. Once again, the WBTS, in principle, assumes the same authority for the Bible: "The Scriptures are God's incomparable gift to mankind, a storehouse of spiritual treasures whose depth of wisdom is unfathomable, and whose power for enlightening and stimulating to righteousness exceeds that of all other books ever written" (All Scripture, 8).

The discerning Christian, however, must ask, "Is the Jehovah's Witnesses' claim of biblical authority accurate?" Actually the Jehovah's Witnesses' assertion to be totally biblically based must be questioned at two major points. One concerns the WBTS's interpretation of the Bible, and the other is regarding the WBTS's translation of the Bible.

Interpretation of the Bible

The WBTS claims that its Governing Body, its highest administrative authority, is the "faithful and discreet slave" mentioned in Matthew 24:45 (New World Translation). It considers itself the only legitimate channel of divinely inspired leadership and the only totally correct interpreters of Scripture in the world today. Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that only WBTS literature is reliable and can be trusted to interpret the Bible correctly.

Jehovah's Witnesses regard all Christian churches, their teachers, writers, and preachers as part of the evil world system, under the control of Satan. Their biblical interpretations are likewise dismissed as flawed, corrupted, and distorted, and are never consulted except to confirm WBTS teachings. Evangelical Christians, however, argue that no one church or organization can claim exclusive authority to interpret the Bible. All Christians are capable, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and with proper training, of understanding the Bible.

Translating the Bible

Christians affirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible. However, the original texts of the biblical books were not written in English. The original Biblical authors wrote in Hebrew, Koine Greek, and, in a few instances, Aramaic. Thus, we do not affirm the same level of inspiration for any translation as we do for the original autographs in the original languages. Bible translators are obliged to carefully review the best extant texts in their original languages when doing their work. Translation is a difficult task and rarely is there universal satisfaction with the final outcome. Revisions and corrections of translations are expected. Only the original Greek and Hebrew texts are invariable.

The WBTS would probably agree, in principle, to the above statement. However, at this point we find one of the most significant differences between Jehovah's Witnesses and nearly every other Bible-believing movement in the world.

In their movements' early years Jehovah's Witnesses used various Bible versions in their studies. In 1950, however, the WBTS published its own English version of the New Testament, which it called The New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Old Testament books were subsequently released as the New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Finally, in 1961, the entire set of WBTS translations was published as The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT). Some revisions have been made since that initial edition, but the NWT essentially remains as it was originally published.

Jehovah's Witnesses regard the NWT as the best, if not the only, reliable Bible translation. It is this critical issue that concerns us here. Is the New World Translation a truly reliable rendering of God's Word? Our contention, in agreement with most of the world's foremost biblical scholars, is that it is not. We will now examine several specific reasons why we hold this position.

The NWT Translation Committee

In an article on the NWT, one WBTS book states that it is... "a translation of the Holy Scriptures made directly from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern-day English by a committee of anointed witnesses of Jehovah" (Reasoning From the Scriptures, 276).

One might naturally ask, "If that is so, just who were the translators on the committee who were so qualified as to make the audacious claim to be 'anointed?'" Surprisingly, in the same book, in direct answer to that question, the following statement is made: "When presenting as a gift the publishing rights to their translation, the New World Bible Translation Committee requested that its members remain anonymous. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania has honored their request" (Reasoning, 277).

The truth is that nowhere in the NWT or any WBTS literature are the names of the translators revealed. Furthermore, the WBTS will not send the names to curious inquirers upon written request.

So, do we know who the NWT translators were? Raymond Franz (1922 - 2010), a former member of the WBTS Governing Body who resigned from the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1980, provided the answer in his book, Crisis of Conscience. He stated that the translation committee consisted of then Governing Body members George Gangas (1897-1994), Albert Schroeder (1911 - 2006), Fredrick Franz (1893 - 1992), and then WBTS President, Nathan Knorr (1905-1977).

"Fred Franz (Raymond Franz's uncle, who later became WBTS President), however, was the only one with sufficient knowledge of the Bible languages to attempt translation of this kind. He had studied Greek for two years in the University of Cincinnati but was only self-taught in Hebrew" (Crisis of Conscience, 50).

The fact is, none of the members of the NWT committee, including Fredrick Franz, were qualified to make a scholarly translation from the original languages. No one on the committee had more than a rudimentary familiarity with Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. This lack of expertise is clearly revealed in the poor and biased quality of the NWT's renderings of many key biblical passages.

The Name of God

Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God is a unitary being who created the universe. They state correctly that God revealed His personal name to Moses in the Old Testament. That name in Hebrew consists of four Hebrew consonants called the Tetragrammaton by Jewish and Christian biblical scholars. In Hebrew it is written HWHY. (Note: Hebrew is read from right to left.)

Many attempts have been made to transliterate the Tetragrammaton in English and other languages. None are adequate since exactly how it was originally pronounced it is not known. Most biblical scholars believe that "Yahweh" is closest to the original pronunciation.

The WBTS, however, traditionally has maintained that the best English transliteration is rendered "Jehovah." Thus, in the NWT, 6,974 times where the Tetragrammaton appears in the Hebrew text (Old Testament), it renders the name of God as "Jehovah".

Most Hebrew scholars find no serious fault with this NWT usage in the Old Testament. Indeed, some older English translations did likewise, including the once popular American Standard Version (1901). The King James Version translators used "Jehovah" in only four instances (see Ex. 6:3; Ps. 83:18; Isa. 12:2; 26:4). They, like most modern translators, preferred

to render the Tetragrammaton by the capitalized designation LORD in keeping with ancient Jewish tradition to avoid pronouncing (or mispronouncing) the sacred name of God.

Consider this statement from the "Principles of Translation" found in the preface of the New American Standard Bible: "In the Scriptures, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for the Deity is God, a translation of the original *Elohim*. One of the titles for God is Lord, a translation of *Adonai*. There is yet another name which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH (Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 42:8). This name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it has been consistently translated Lord. The only exception to this translation of YHWH is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, *Adonai*. In that case it is regularly translated God in order to avoid confusion. It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh, however, no complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation (NASB, iv)."

The Jehovah's Witnesses criticize this practice as Jewish and Christian attempts to obscure the sacred name of Jehovah God from people. They argue that it demonstrates the satanic nature of modern religious practice.

Granted, some Christian scholars acknowledge that the use of LORD instead of the sacred name is unwarranted and that perhaps Yahweh or Jehovah should be the English transliteration. The Holman Christians Standard Bible, for instance, uses Yahweh often in its Old Testament version.

That being said, the WBTS contention that the Tetragrammaton is somehow the exclusive sacred name of God is unwarranted. In fact, in the Old Testament, several other common names for God are used in Hebrew including *Elohim* (a generic word for God); El (a shorter form of *Elohim*); and other combinations of terms such as *El-Elyon* (God Most High) and *El-Shaddai* (God Almighty).

Jehovah's Witnesses makes a reasonable case for using the sacred name in the Old Testament. However, in the WBTS's translation of the New Testament, which they call The Christian Greek Scriptures, is a grievous and presumptuous error. The NWT inexplicably translates the common Greek words for Lord (*kurios*) and God (*Theos*) as "Jehovah" 237 times in the New Testament. This unwarranted substitutionary use of the Old Testament name of God is made, however, only when *kurios* is used in the context of a reference to God in a generic sense, or when used in a passage that quotes from the Old Testament. Never do they translate *kurios* as "Jehovah" in the nearly 400 times in the New Testament when it is applied as a title to Jesus Christ. There is no legitimate textual or linguistic basis for making that distinction. The word *kurios* should always be accurately translated, according to context, as "Lord" or "Master", and the word *Theos* as God, but neither should ever be translated as "Jehovah."

The reason for the NWT committee's placement of this name of God in the New Testament is obvious to anyone cognizant of Jehovah's Witnesses theology. Jehovah's Witnesses, since their inception over a century ago, totally reject the Christian doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the full deity of Jesus Christ. As a result, in its literature, and especially in its translation of the Bible, the WBTS has sought to obscure the clear New Testament teachings of those truths. This deliberate concealment is obvious when one compares the NWT to the word-for-word translation of the Westcott and Hort Greek Text in the WBTS' own book The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures.

The use of Jehovah to translate *kurios* (Lord) or *Theos* (God) 237 times in generic reference to God, but never as a title of Jesus, is clearly done to reinforce the distinction between God and Jesus in the minds of uninformed Jehovah's Witnesses. The truth is that the New Testament writers, following Jewish tradition in the Greek Septuagint's translation of the Old Testament, understood the term *kurios* (Lord), in most cases, to be a reference to deity in the fullest sense. Thus, when New Testament writers called Jesus "Lord," they were identifying Him with the God of the Old Testament (Yahweh or Jehovah).

The WBTS' denial of Jesus' deity is evidenced in numerous biased and inaccurate renderings of key passages by the NWT translators. Consider the following examples:

- -- John 1:1 The NWT renders this verse: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Nearly every other English translation agrees with that of the NASB: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
- -- John 8:58 The NWT renders this verse: "Jesus said to them, 'Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been." The NASB renders it, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." The term "I am" is a definite allusion to the Old Testament name of God (YHWH), which is a derivative of the word for "I am."
- -- Acts 10:36 The NWT translates this verse: "He sent out the word to the sons of Israel to declare to them the good news of peace through Jesus Christ: this One is Lord of all [others]." The NASB renders it: "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)."
- -- Titus 2:13 Rendered in the NWT: "While we wait for the happy hope and glorious manifestation of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus." The NASB, in agreement with nearly all other versions, says: "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Each of the above biblical examples, as well as many others, demonstrate the conscious effort by the NWT translators to deny the full deity of Jesus Christ in accordance with Jehovah's Witnesses doctrine.

Conclusion

Jehovah's witnesses maintain that their English translation of the Bible, The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, is the best version ever produced. The evidence does not bear that conclusion. Actually, the consensus of expert opinion is that the NWT ranks as one of the most unscholarly and biased Bible versions ever produced.

Unfortunately, millions of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide are required to consult the NWT exclusively. Thus, only the doctrinal biases and distortions of the WBTS are absorbed by faithful Jehovah's Witnesses.

Christians must help them understand why the NWT cannot be trusted. Christians need to explain the problems of the NWT and point to clear biblical teachings from accurate Bible versions. This is especially critical when addressing key doctrines such as the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation.

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39. Your Must-Know Guide to Baal By Freddy Davis

Over the years, as you have studied the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, you have certainly come across the many passages where references were made to Baal. You, no doubt, know that Baal was a fertility god worshiped by the nations which surrounded Israel. You know that Israel went through periods of time when they allowed Baal worship to infiltrate their own society. And you know that this Baal worship was one of the main reason God became angry at Israel and imposed judgment on various occasions.

Why an Understanding of Baal Worship Is Relevant to Understanding the Bible

If you have studied the Bible for any significant length of time, you have probably done at least a little bit of background research on this religion. But you have probably never looked at it from a worldview perspective. Today, we want to remedy that situation. By gaining this more indepth knowledge of Baal worship, two things should happen for you. First, you will be able to understand more fully the implications of what is being taught in the Bible when you come across references to this religion. Secondly, it should give you more insight into certain modern religions that are becoming more prominent in our day. Not that Baal worship, per se, is once again practiced. But as a religion based on an Animistic worldview, it has much in common with other forms of Animistic belief.

History of Baal Worship

Baal worship was the most prominent religious system of the Canaanite people groups which surrounded Israelite culture during the time when Israel occupied the promised land after they fled Egypt. This Animistic belief system had its roots in ancient Babylon and northern Syria.

Baal worship centered around a god named Baal who was the leader of the gods. The Semitic word Baal literally means "lord" or "master." He was understood to be the storm god who was responsible for bringing rain, and thus fertility, to the land. There is a mythological story that tells the background of Baal worship.

It seems that at some point in the history of the gods, there came a rivalry between Baal and Yamm, the sea god. Ultimately Baal defeated Yamm with the help of his sister Anat, the goddess of war, and Astarte/Asherah, the goddess of earth and fertility. Asherah became Baal's consort.

Because of his victory, other gods began to build a great house for Baal so he could be at rest and provide plenty of rain for the earth. But the god of death and the underworld, Mot, challenged Baal and temporarily defeated him. For a period of time, Baal disappeared into the underworld. But Anat and the sun god Shapash, brought him back to life and restored him to his house. It was believed that as a part of this process, Baal went to live in the underworld during the dry winter season. Then when spring came, he would return to earth to sleep with his consort, Asherah, so that the rains would return to the land.

Basic Beliefs and Practices of Baal Worship

The purpose of the Baal myth was to give human beings an explanation of the workings of nature, particularly as it related to the production of rain for the crops of the agrarian people who lived in that region of the world. Baal temporarily going to the underworld represented the dry season or periods of drought when not much rain fell. The rainy season represented the resuscitation of Baal which allowed him to return to the land of the living and provide rain.

There is also a contrast between Baal, the god of rain (fresh water), and Yamm, the god of the sea (salt water). It is only the fresh water of rain that is able to provide for the fertility of the ground, so Baal must win out.

The practice of Baal worship by humans, though, was focused on the element of fertility. It was believed by those who worshiped Baal that human beings were able to help strengthen Baal in his struggle with Mot by taking certain actions. These actions specifically involved performing magic, engaging in certain rituals (which included child sacrifice), and sexual interaction with sacred prostitutes. The magic, rituals and sexual activity were all designed to encourage Baal's return to mate with Asherah so that he could bring the rains.

The worship of Baal was generally performed in "high places." These were typically temples or clearings up on mountains.

Essential Beliefs of Baal Worship *God*

As a somewhat traditional Animistic religion, Baal worship believes in many gods which are primarily associated with elements of nature. It is believed that these gods live in the spirit world but are symbiotically connected to the material world. What happens in the spirit world affects what goes on in the material world and vice versa.

Baal, in particular, is the storm god. By providing rain, he is responsible for the earth's fertility.

Man

Mankind, in the Baal religion, is understood to be a physical being who lives in the material world, but has a spiritual core. It is believed that human beings will enter the spirit world at physical death and will then have influence over what happens in the material world. In the meantime, human beings affect what goes on in the spirit world by means of rituals, prayers and offerings.

Salvation

Salvation for human beings, in Baal worship, relates to doing all one can to make life as comfortable as possible. This involves helping and encouraging the gods to fulfill their obligations toward the material world, as well as appearing the gods to make personal life more comfortable.

How Baal Belief Answers the 7 Worldview Questions

1. What is the most fundamental reality? (Ultimate reality) and 2. What is the nature of our material reality? (Material reality)

As is common with most forms of Animistic thought, the Baal religion believes that the spiritual and physical worlds are both part of a single existence. Spirits exist in a separate dimension from physical beings, but they interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship.

3. What is a human being? (Humanity)

According to Baal beliefs, human beings are material creatures who inhabit the physical world. They are understood to have a spiritual core which connects them to the spirit world.

4. What happens to a person at death? (Death)

Baal belief asserts that at death, an individual's spirit enters the spiritual dimension.

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? (Knowledge)

Knowledge, in Baal belief, is simply assumed to exist and is known by observation.

6. How do we know what is right and wrong? (Morality)

Morality, in the Baal religion, was learned by observation and experience. As people observed what caused good and bad things to happen in the material world, they associated that with the pleasure and displeasure of the gods. Over time (generations), a moral code was developed based on these observations.

7. What is the meaning of human history? (History)

History, in the Baal religion, is understood to be a linear progression of events without special meaning.

Why this is relevant today

Obviously, Baal worship, as such, does not exist today. However, there are numerous other modern belief systems which are similar in many ways. We don't normally tend to see the particulars of ritual prostitution or infant sacrifice in current Animistic worship forms (though there may be instances of one or the other). But the underlying Animistic belief structure is

certainly around. This foundation is found in such belief systems as Wicca, paganism, Voodoo, Santeria, Japanese Shinto, Native American religions and the like.

There are two reasons understanding Baal worship is relevant for today.

First, it helps us understand Biblical teachings more clearly. God does not want us worshiping false gods, and the better we understand the range of false gods in existence, the more clearly we are able to contrast that with the nature of the one true God. This will definitely help us order our lives in ways which strengthen our own faith and our personal relationship with God.

The second reason it is important is that by understanding the basis of Baal worship, we gain insights as to how we can share a witness with modern Animists. The basic foundation will be the same.

An understanding of worldview is not merely an academic exercise. It has practical implications for every part of life. Everyone believes something! By understanding the belief possibilities, we put ourselves in a position to be used ever more effectively by God.

40. The Dubious Legacy of Herbert W. ArmstrongBy Tal Davis

If you are old enough, you may remember in the late 1960s or early 70s turning on your AM radio late at night. In those days you could pick up clear-channel stations from all over the country. At almost any time of the night you would pick up stations broadcasting what sounded like a news commentary show called The World Tomorrow. It featured a golden voiced speaker named Garner Ted Armstrong. If you bothered to listen you would eventually realize that the man was preaching a rather unusual message about prophecy in the Bible.

Garner Ted Armstrong (1930 - 2003) was actually proclaiming the doctrines of his father's bizarre interpretations of the Bible. His father was Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986), whose legacy continues in the various religious movements that still trace their origins to him.

Herbert W. Armstrong was born in Des Moines, Iowa, on July 31, 1892. As a young man, Armstrong was involved in several failed business ventures. In 1924 he moved to Oregon, where he and his first wife, Loma, became involved in Adventism. From them he adopted several unusual doctrines, including Seventh-day sabbatarianism and Old Testament dietary legalism. In 1926, Armstrong began an intense study of the Bible during which he claimed to have discovered the lost key to scriptural interpretation. His lost key was actually an old discredited theory called British-Israelism. He claimed that the ten lost tribes of Israel can be identified in modern times as the peoples of Europe, the British Isles, and North America.

In 1931, Armstrong was ordained as a minister in the Church of God (Seventh-Day) (COGSD). He soon broke from that sect to form his own movement when his lost tribes theories were rejected by COGSD leaders. He also began to teach a strange nontrinitarian theology of God called the "God-Family" doctrine. In 1934, he began a radio broadcast called The World Tomorrow and founded the Radio Church of God (renamed the Worldwide Church of God [WCOG])

The movement grew, and, in 1947, Armstrong established Ambassador College in Pasadena, California, to train young ministers and proliferate his doctrines. He later opened branch campuses in England and Texas.

Armstrong's son, Garner Ted Armstrong, a master communicator, took over The World Tomorrow radio broadcasts in 1963, and later expanded into international television. In 1972,

Garner Ted Armstrong was suspended from his broadcasts for four months by his father for alleged sexual misconduct. Garner Ted Armstrong was excommunicated from his father's church in 1978, and founded the Church of God International (COGI) in Tyler, Texas. In 1995, he was also dismissed by COGI and, in 1998, started another organization, the Intercontinental Church of God (ICOG) where he continued his television ministry until his death in 2003, at age 73. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote a number of small booklets which were distributed free by his organization. His two most important books that spelled out his theological and prophetic concepts were The United States and Britain in Prophecy (1954) and Mystery of the Ages (1985).

In the 1970s, Herbert W. Armstrong was criticized by many inside and outside of the church for his extravagant lifestyle. In 1978, the WCOG was investigated by the state of California for mismanagement of funds, and in 1979 was placed in state receivership. After several years of close government scrutiny, the church returned to solvency and remained under Armstrong's leadership.

Herbert W. Armstrong was 93 when he died in 1986 of old age. He was succeeded as pastorgeneral of the WCOG by Joseph W. Tkach (1927-1995). Over the following decade, Tkach, and his successor, Joseph W. Tkach, Jr., led the Worldwide Church of God through significant theological and ecclesiastical reforms, publically renouncing the unorthodox teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong. Doctrines they rejected included the God-family concept, British-Israelism, and legalistic Seventh-day sabbatarianism. In 1993, the WCOG officially affirmed the historic Christian doctrine of the Trinity and, in 1997, was accepted for membership in the National Association of Evangelicals. In 2009, to further distance itself from Armstrong, the WCOG officially changed its name to Grace Communion International (CGI).

As a result of these changes, several splinter organizations led by ex-members of the WCOG loyal to Armstrong's teachings were formed. Their leaders continued to espouse Armstrong's unorthodox doctrines in print and on the airwaves. Those neo-Armstrongist leaders and movements included Gerald Flurry of the Philadelphia Church of God, Roy Holladay of the United Church of God, and David Hulme of the Church of God-Pasadena, California.

Organizations and their leaders associated with Armstrongism today include the following:

- -- The Church of God, Pasadena (COGP) in Pasadena, Calif., led by David Hulme. (www.church-of-god.org) Publishes the Church of God News magazine.
- -- The Church of God, International (COGI) in Tyler, Texas. Broadcasts The Armor of God television program. (http://www.cgi.org/) Current leader not known.
- -- The Church of God-Preparing for the Kingdom of God (COGPKG) in Cincinnati, Ohio, led by Ronald Weinland. (www.cog-pkg.org)
- -- The Intercontinental Church of God (ICOG in-Tyler, Texas, led by Mark Armstrong (son of Garner Ted). (www.intercontinentalcog.org) Also associated with The Garner Ted Evangelistic Association. Publishes 21st Century Watch magazine.
- -- The Living Church of God (LCG)-Charlotte, N.C., led by Roderick C. Meredith broadcasts Tomorrow's World television program. (www.lcg.org)
- -- The Philadelphia Church of God (PCOG) in Edmond, Okla., led Gerald Flurry. Broadcasts The Key of David television program and publishes The Philadelphia Trumpet magazine. www.pcog.org
- -- The United Church of God (UCOG) in Arcadia, Calif., led by Roy Holladay. (www.ucg.org) Publishes The Good News magazine.

Doctrines of Armstrongism

Herbert W. Armstrong taught that the Bible was a divinely inspired book and the authoritative Word of God. However, he taught that the key to interpreting it had been obscured by God until these last days when he, by divine inspiration, discovered it. Thus, Armstrong regarded himself as the only legitimate interpreter of Scripture and his movement as the only true church of God. Armstrong's books and pamphlets are still distributed by Armstrongist groups and are regarded as authoritative.

Christians agree that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God. However, Armstrong's claims to his singularly authoritative interpretation must be rejected. Many of his unusual doctrines are based on faulty biblical presuppositions. The Bible should be interpreted by sound principles of hermeneutics. Christians of all generations have had the capability of understanding its essential teachings (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Herbert W. Armstrong taught an unusual theological concept saying that God presently consists of two separate individuals, the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ-excluding the Holy Spirit. These two comprise the God-family. According to Armstrong, the preexistent Jesus, called Melchizedek and Yahweh in the Old Testament, was born as a man.

Jesus Christ existed from all eternity but was subordinate to the Father. He was born again into the godhead at His resurrection, which was not physical, but only spiritual. The Holy Spirit, according to Armstrong, is not divine and not a person. It is regarded merely as the spiritual extension of God, containing His essence and power.

Armstrong's novel teaching on the nature of God is untenable. The one God is the personal, eternal, and infinite Creator of all that exists. He exists eternally as a Trinity-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the virgin-born, incarnate Son of God, who existed eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He lived a sinless life, willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sin of humanity, and rose again physically from the dead.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and is coeternal with the Father and the Son. He convicts unbelievers of their need for salvation and indwells believers at conversion to empower them for effective and holy living (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 15:1-8).

According to Armstrong, human beings have no immortal soul. Rather, they cease to exist at death. He taught that Mankind is naturally evil, but individuals may join the God-family. They must accept the redemption made by Christ, be obedient and faithful to God's laws, and eventually be born again after death into membership in the God-family.

Herbert W. Armstrong also taught that salvation is not a present reality, but totally future. He stated that no one, except Jesus, is yet saved or born again. God will soon establish His government of God on earth led by Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in Christ and are obedient to God's commandments will be resurrected from the dead and born again into the God-family. Members are expected to observe the Seventh-day Sabbath and the Old Testament festivals.

The Bible teaches that Human beings are created in the image of God and, as such, have an immortal soul. Nonetheless, people are by nature sinners, in need of the free gift of eternal life (Gen. 1:26-27; Rom. 3:23). Believers are totally saved and born again as a past, present, and future reality when they repent of their sins and, by grace through faith, receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (John 3:16; Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23).

Herbert W. Armstrong taught that all Christian denominations are apostate and have lost the true biblical Gospel message of the government of God. He claimed that by divine direction he restored the true gospel of Christ to the world in 1933. He claimed that his was, therefore, the

only true movement of God in the world and was ordained by God to prepare the world for the return of Christ.

There is no organization, denomination, or religious movement that can claim exclusive designation as the only true church. Christ's universal church consists of all the redeemed in Jesus Christ in all of the ages. There is no evidence that Herbert W. Armstrong, or his movement, is uniquely ordained of God to proclaim an end-times message (Matt. 16:15-19; 1 Cor. 1:12-14; Eph. 2:19; 3:11-12).

In terms of eschatology, Herbert W. Armstrong taught an unusual old form of prophetic biblical interpretation called British-Israelism, also called Anglo- Israelism. This long ago discredited idea, which originated in the eighteenth century in England, says that the Western European peoples are descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Specifically, the British and their North American offspring are the descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. The King or Queen of England is believed to be sitting on the throne of King David-which means that they, and not the Jews, are the true inheritors of the prophetic promises of God to His chosen people. Thus, all end-time biblical prophecy must be seen through that perspective.

Armstrong also taught that a final world battle- Armageddon-will soon take place, after which Christ will return to establish the government of God on earth for 1000 years. At the close of the millennium, a final judgment will occur in which the wicked will be annihilated. The redeemed will inherit eternal life on a perfect earth. Eventually those who are born again will join the Father and Jesus in the godhead as God-family.

As stated, Armstrong's British-Israel interpretation of biblical prophecy has been discredited by many Hebrew and Greek scholars. Likewise, there is no basis for maintaining that Europeans are the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel-or that the tribes were ever really lost.

The doctrine of eternal hell was taught by Jesus and the New Testament. The saved will enjoy eternal life with Christ in heaven and the lost will suffer eternal punishment (Matt. 18:8-9; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; John 3:16; 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20-22).

Witnessing to People Influenced by Armstrongism

- 1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible. Learn basic biblical truths and be able to defend your beliefs from Scripture.
- 2. Reaffirm the Bible alone as your authority. State that any doctrines or practices that cannot be confirmed scripturally, using sound principles of interpretation, are not valid. State that no one interpreter of the Bible has exclusive understanding or any special key to interpretation.
- 3. Know the basic teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong and the various organizations that espouse them. Learn how Armstrong deviated from biblical teaching on many essential issues.
- 4. Define all terms thoroughly both from the historic Christian perspective and from the Armstrong perspective. Be prepared to demonstrate how they differ.
- 5. Determine the person's level of commitment to Armstrongism on doctrines and organization. Many people not holding formal membership in one of the Armstrongist groups may nonetheless be influenced by the literature or broadcasts of Armstrongist ministries.
- 6. Build a personal relationship with the Armstrongist follower. Using the Bible, discuss various doctrinal issues as they arise. Focus on the essential issues of the nature of God, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation and spiritual rebirth.
- 7. Present the clear biblical gospel of salvation-by grace through faith-to your Armstrongist friend. Show that salvation is entirely a free gift, and not a matter of adherence to legalistic precepts or membership in any organization.

8. Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead you in your encounter and to open the heart of your Armstrongist friend to the biblical truth of the gospel.

41. The Bahá'í Faith

By Tal Davis

A couple of years ago I was on a speaking tour of the south Pacific island nation of Samoa. One day my host drove me to an area outside of the capital city of Apia. There he showed me a very unusual looking building. It was round and sort of cone shaped with nine sides. It was a Baha'i House of Worship (also called a Temple). Only eight such temples exist around the world, including Wilmette, Ill. in the United States. Many people have heard of Bahá'í, but most have little understanding of its history and beliefs.

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad.

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. God, Bahá'u'lláh said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed, and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilization. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification ("The Bahá'í Faith," www.bahai.org/article-1-2-0-1.html [cited 21 March 2001]).

History of the Bahá'í Faith

In the early nineteenth century, just as today, the nation of Persia, now called Iran, was steeped in the culture and law of the Islamic Shi'ites. Into that environment was born a man, Mirza Ali Muhammad (1819-1850), who in 1844, at the age of 25, declared that God had chosen him to be "the Báb" (the "Gate" or the "Door") and create a new religious tradition. It would be a religion that would eventually be led by a yet to be revealed great "Manifestation" of God. That declaration was considered heretical by Muslims and drew great persecution upon the Báb and his followers. He was executed for blasphemy in 1850.

One of the Báb's followers was a Persian named Mirza Husayn-Ali (1817-1892). Though two years older than the Báb, Mirza Husayn-Ali was a dedicated disciple of his teaching and was imprisoned in Persia after the Báb's death. In 1853, Mirza Husayn-Ali fled to Baghdad, Iraq, where he continued to preach the Báb's message.

In 1863, Mirza Husayn-Ali declared that he was the Great Manifestation of God that the Báb had promised was coming. He then adopted the title of "Bahá'u'lláh" ("the glory of God"). In the years following this bold declaration he was again imprisoned by Muslim rulers and eventually exiled to Palestine in 1868. There he produced the writings that would later become the holy scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith.

When Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892, his eldest son, Àbdu'l-Bahá, was designated the leader of the new faith. His authority, however, was only as interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and not as another manifestation of God.

Àbdu'l-Bahá, like his father, spent time in prison, but in 1908 began a world tour proclaiming the Bahá'í message and advocating world peace. He visited the United States in 1912 where he

was warmly received by some Americans. In 1920 he was knighted by the British crown for his humanitarian work during the First World War.

Àbdu'l-Bahá died in 1921 and was succeeded by his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as "the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith." Shoghi Effendi died in 1957 after establishing the Universal House of Justice in Haifa, Israel. It stands as the permanent governing body for the Bahá'í International Community.

But what does Baha'ism believe, and how does it compare to Christianity? In the next section we will analyze Baha'i doctrines and critique them from a biblical point of view.

Authority: The "Holy," the "Hands," and the "House"

Bahá'ís are respectful of the scriptures of other religious traditions such as the Bible for Jews and Christians and the Koran for Muslims. Nevertheless, they regard the "holy" writings of Bahá'u'lláh as the supreme revelations of God. Most important are *The Most Holy Book* and *The Book of Certitude*. The writings of the Báb, Àbdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi are also considered authoritative.

Since Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957, leadership for Bahá'ís worldwide resides with the few surviving members of "The Hands of the Cause of God," a group of leaders selected by Shoghi Effendi personally to guide the movement, and the nine elected members of the Universal House of Justice (UHJ) in Haifa, Israel. The Hands' and UHJ's official writings and edicts are regarded by Bahá'ís as authoritative and binding.

Christians believe the Bible is God's unique Word and the only true source of divinely inspired Scripture. No human source or other writing is equal to, or can supersede, its authority. It is the basis alone for Christian doctrine and practice. Jesus Christ Himself affirmed the authority of the Bible in the lives of all people (see Matt. 5:17-19; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

God: One Divine Being

Bahá'ís are monotheistic in their belief in one divine supernatural Being who created all that exists. That Being, whom they call God, exhibits the characteristics of omnipotence, perfection, and omniscience. Although various religions may seem to pray to or worship different gods, Bahá'ís maintain that in essence they all worship the same unique Being using different names.

Bahá'ís, however, believe that God's essence is unknowable by finite human beings. Thus, we can understand the attributes or qualities of God, but never experience direct knowledge of His divine essence. What we can know of God is revealed progressively throughout history by His Manifestations (prophets).

The Bible teaches that there is indeed only one God (Deut. 6:4) and that He is the Creator of all that exists. However, the Bible warns that all other gods are false and those who worship them are guilty of idolatry (Ex. 20:3-4; Isa. 44:6-8).

The New Testament teaches that God exists eternally in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:2). The Bible also teaches that people can know God through a personal relationship with His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2), and not just have information about Him.

Jesus: One of the "Manifestations" of God

Bahá'ís regard Jesus Christ as a great messenger/prophet or "Manifestation" of God. However, they do not regard Him as particularly unique. In their view, Jesus Christ was just one of at least

nine such Manifestations, or prophets, who have appeared in various times and places throughout the world. Each Manifestation contributed new light to the progression of revelation from God given by each Manifestation to his generation. The nine Manifestations included Moses, Krishna, Abraham, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. Some Bahá'í sources have also included Confucius, Hud, and Salih. In any case, Bahá'u'lláh is considered the primary prophet for the modern era. His teachings are expected to eventually unify the world's peoples, governments, and religions under God's universal principles of peace and justice. The next Manifestation is not expected for about 900 years.

The divine Manifestations are not understood by Bahá'ís as "incarnations" of God in the Christian sense, as He is too far removed from His finite creation. Nonetheless, they are all regarded as sinless and possessing such self-validating truth so as to be true "mirrors" of the divine nature.

We would respond by saying Jesus Christ is the "one and Only Begotten Son of God" (John 3:16). He is the unique incarnation (embodiment) of God who perfectly reveals God's nature and character to mankind (Heb. 1:1-2). He was, is, and always shall be the Second Person of the eternal Holy Trinity. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified as an atonement for sin, and rose physically from the dead. He now reigns with the Father in heaven and someday will return to close the age and judge all people. There is no other one in all of history like Him (John 1:1-14; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; 14:6; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9).

Granted, many of the other Bahá'í "Manifestations" taught high moral standards and encouraged peace and social justice. None, however, demonstrated the level of divine authority as did Jesus who demonstrated His power by His resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

Salvation and Life after Death

Bahá'í Faith teaches that humanity is possessed with a duality of spiritual and material natures. The material nature, if allowed to dominate one's personality, leads to selfish desires and evil results. If the spiritual nature dominates, it leads to a life of virtue, compassion, self-sacrifice, and nearness with God and his principles.

If one follows those principles and lives a life of spiritual good deeds, he or she will enter the kingdom of paradise, or heaven, both in this life and after death. If one turns away from a life of spiritual deeds and does evil, he or she is already in hell, which will continue after death.

The Bible teaches that salvation is a free gift to those who acknowledge their sinfulness (Rom. 3:23; 6:23), repent of their sin (Acts 26:20), and receive Jesus Christ, by faith, as their personal Lord and Savior (John 1:12; Rom. 10:9-13). Only His death on the cross provides atonement for mankind's sin, and His resurrection guarantees eternal life in heaven (Rom. 4:23-25; 1 Cor. 15:1-8; 1 Pet. 3:18). Those who reject that free gift will be lost forever in hell (Matt. 18:8-9; 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48).

Basic Moral Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh

The Bahá'í Faith maintains that the basic moral teachings of its primary prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, can be summarized in eight basic principles. Each of them, Bahá'ís believe, embody the essence of all religions and thus are valid for all people in all times.

1. The abandonment of all forms of prejudice

Bahá'ís argue that humanity is essentially one race. All differences among people based on race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or religion are regarded as contrary to God's desire for one world unity. As a result, cross-cultural, interracial, and international marriages are encouraged.

Christians affirm the unity of humanity as all descendants of mutual parents, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2). Cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity is a part of God's plan as He has created all people in His image and placed them in the times and places He desires (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; Acts 17:24-28). Only in Christ, however, can mankind find a unity of purpose that transcends superficial human divisions (Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 2:11-15).

2. Assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men

The statement of principles for Baha'i says: "The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged, prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations " (Source: The Promise of World Peace, Universal House of Justice, 1985, www.bahai.org/article-1-7-0-6.html [cited 29 March 2001]).

Jesus Christ elevated the status of women more than any religion in history. Thus Christians strongly affirm the equality and rights of women before God as persons made in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). The Bible, however, celebrates the complementary roles within the family and church for men and women as they work together to build the kingdom of God (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-21; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

3. Recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth

Bahá'ís maintain that all of the world's great religions teach the same basic principles Each of the founders of the world's religions, the "Manifestations" of God, have contributed their light to their time and place. The principle of unity of religion, nonetheless, means that all the great religious founders have come from the same God, and all of the systems they established are part of a single plan directed by Him.

The Bahá'í assertion that all religions teach the same essential truths ignores the major doctrinal and philosophical contradictions that characterize them. Most important, Bahá'í ignores the unique claims of Jesus Christ to be the one and only begotten Son of God and the unique incarnation of God (John 1:14,18; 3:16-18; Heb. 1:1-14; 1 John 4:9).

Bahá'ís also ignore the important differences in how salvation is realized in Christianity as opposed to most other faiths. In most religions, salvation is earned by adherence to various laws of behavior and human achievement. Christianity asserts that salvation is entirely by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as a result of His life, sacrificial atoning death, and resurrection (John 14:6; Eph. 2:8-9).

4. The elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth

Bahá'ís regard the economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor as a grave moral injustice. This is true, as they see it, between individuals and nations. Thus, Bahá'ís actively seek to correct this imbalance through economic and legal methods.

The Bible does not teach that accumulating wealth, in and of itself, is necessarily evil or sinful. Nonetheless, Scripture warns that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: (1 Tim. 6:10, NIV) and that Christians are to be faithful stewards (managers) of the material resources God entrusts to us (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 25:14-30).

5. The realization of universal education

Baha'is assert: "The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. . . . In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child". (Source: The Promise of World Peace, Universal House of Justice, Oct. 1985, www.bahai.org/article-1-3-2-16.html [cited 29 March 2001]).

Christians affirm the benefits of literacy and education and support the goal of universal education. However, the Bible does not teach that a lack of education is the basic problem of mankind. The Bible states that sin is the basic root of mankind's problems, including war and injustice. Sin is defined as rebellion or indifference to the will of God for each person (Rom. 3:23) which results in death (Rom. 6:23).

The only solution for sin is the salvation granted by God by grace through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ which results in good works (Eph. 2:8-10). Education that ignores this basic sin problem will not necessarily value righteousness, justice, or peace, but often results in oppressive indoctrination as illustrated historically by the highly educated societies in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

6. The responsibility of each person independently to search for truth

Bahá'í Faith encourages each individual to think critically and to search for ultimate truth for themselves. Uncritical attachments to traditional ways of thinking and ideologies that dogmatically reject others may lead to intolerance and conflict. Bahá'ís believe that there is only one reality, thus all those who diligently and sincerely seek truth, will be united ultimately.

The Bahá'í state that truth is one, but that it is wrong to question or criticize other's beliefs, is self-contradictory. The truth claims of various religious traditions are in many cases totally incompatible. Bahá'ís simply ignore the discrepancies, in order to synthesize them into a unitary system. This doctrinal compromise, however, actually elevates Bahá'ísm to the level of the superior faith and denigrates the unique beliefs of all other faiths.

In any case, Jesus Christ, and the biblical writers, made exclusive truth claims about Him that Christians cannot compromise (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The Bible warns in the Old and New Testaments against blending counterfeit faith with authentic faith. It also warns God's people to reject false gods, false prophets, and false worship (Gen. 4:3-4; Num. 33:52-56; Deut. 12:2-3; 18:9-22; 1 Kings 18:16-40; Jer. 14:14-16; Matt. 7:15-21; 24:4-5,23-26; Mark 13:5-23; Luke 17:23-27; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:4-15; Gal. 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:9; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-5; 2 John 7-11).

7. The establishment of a global commonwealth of nations

Bahá'ís are convinced that a major priority for mankind is the establishment of a just and lasting world peace. Bahá'u'lláh declared that the world "is but one country and mankind its

citizens" (www.bahai.org/article-1-3-2-19.html [cited 29 March 2001]). In order to realize this vision of one united world, Bahá'ís advocate new international social structures that transcend the authority of autonomous nations in order to ensure and maintain world peace and security. Bahá'ís would desire that these systems guarantee individual freedom and be based on democratic principles.

Christians agree that people should work to establish societies and peace among humanity. However, they would maintain that the true remedy for war is not a world government, but the transforming message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Total peace will come only with the coming of the Lord at the end of the age (Isa. 2:4; Matt. 5:9,38-48; 6:33; 26:52; Rom. 12:18-19; 13:1-7; 14:19; Heb. 12:14; Jas. 4:1-2).

8. Recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge

"When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles – and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God". (Àbdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 146, www.bahai.org/article-1-3-2-18.html[cited 29 March 2001]).

Christians agree that there is no conflict between biblical faith and objective scientific inquiry. However, they reject the dogmatic materialistic and naturalistic worldview that characterizes most of the modern scientific community. Science is a valid source of truth, but Christians likewise regard divine revelation as providing information that science cannot explain by its methods of inquiry (Rom. 1:20-23).

Witnessing to Bahá'ís:

Try to establish a sincere personal relationship with Bahá'ís. Make it clear to them that you respect their right to believe as they will, but that you reserve the right to disagree. Focus your discussion on the Person and work of Jesus Christ and explain why He is unique among the world's religious leaders. Share with your Bahá'í friend that mankind's basic problem is sin, not illiteracy or social injustice. Explain to the Bahá'í the basics of the Christian gospel. Stress the need for confession of sin, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior. Provide written materials for the Bahá'í to read that explain and defend Christianity, such as Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ* or C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.

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42. Unmasking the Word-Faith Movement - Part 1 By Tal Davis

"If you just exercise enough faith then you will be healed of all your infirmities and God will bless you with prosperity. It's guaranteed in the Bible. Just look at Mark 11:23, 'For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into

the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."

So say preachers and advocates of one of the most visible, but least understood, religious perspectives in America today – the Word-Faith Movement. That strange subculture of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity is also known by other designations including the following: the "Word of Faith," the Health and Wealth Gospel, "Name It and Claim It," the "Faith" Movement, the "Positive Confession" Movement, and the Prosperity Gospel. In this installment we will examine the history and leaders of the Word-Faith movement. In the next installment we will analyze its theology and implications for modern Christianity.

By whatever name, Word-faith is the basic theological foundation for many of America's best known TV evangelists including the following:

- **1. Kenneth and Gloria Copeland** Kenneth Copeland Ministries, *Believers Voice of Victory* TV, Fort Worth Texas
 - 2. Charles Capps Concepts of Faith radio and TV ministries, England, Arkansas
- **3. Benny Hinn** Former pastor of the Orlando Christian Center, Orlando, Florida. Now leads mass healing crusades around the world and hosts *This Is Your Day* TV from Orange County, California.
- **4. Fredrick Price** Crenshaw Christian Center, and *Ever Increasing Faith* TV and radio Ministries, Los Angeles, California
- **5. Creflo Dollar** World Changers Church International; Creflo Dollar Ministerial Association (formerly called International Covenant Ministries); Creflo Dollar Ministries, and Arrow Records, Atlanta, Georgia
 - **6. Joyce Meyer** Joyce Meyer Ministries, Fenton, Missouri.
- **7. Paula White** Without Walls International Church; *Paula White Today* TV; Paula White Ministries, Tampa, Florida.
- **8. Rod Parsley** World Harvest Church, The Center for Moral Clarity, Breakthrough (a media ministry), the Bridge of Hope missions organization, Valor Christian College, Harvest Preparatory School, World Harvest Ministerial Alliance, Metro Harvest Church (an inner-city and prison outreach), Latin Harvest Church (a Spanish-language church) and The Women's Clinic, Columbus, Ohio.
- **9. Marilyn Hickey** Orchard Road Christian Center, Marilyn Hickey Ministries, *Marilyn and Sarah* (Her daughter) TV, Denver, Colorado
- **10. Margaret Smith Court** Former Australian world champion tennis player. Pastor of Victory Life Centre and host of *A Life of Victory* TV in Perth, Australia.

11. Paul and Jan Crouch - Founders of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), and hosts of *Praise the Lord* TV show, Dallas, Texas. (The Crouches have recently come under government scrutiny after allegations by their granddaughter of financial irregularities surrounding their lavish spending habits, including a \$100,000 dollar mobile home for their dog.)

Origins of the Word-Faith Movement

Most researchers agree that the Word-faith movement began in the early 20th century with a New England Baptist pastor named E. W. Kenyon (1867 - 1948). Kenyon was influenced by 19th century faith-healing teachers like A. J. Gordon (1836 - 1895) and A. B. Simpson (1843 - 1919), but took their ideas several steps further.

Some critics, such as D. R. McConnell, in his book *A Different Gospel: Biblical and Historical Insights into the Word of Faith Movement*, maintain that Kenyon got most of his doctrines from mind-science (MS). Those included cultists like the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy (1821 - 1910), and the founder of the New Thought Movement, Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802 - 1866). Indeed there is some evidence that Kenyon studied New Thought concepts as a young man. Some current teachers in Kenyon's tradition espouse ideas very similar to those of MS.

Other researchers, such as Rob Bowman, author of *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (2001), argue that Kenyon merely took the ideas of earlier Pentecostal healing preachers and expanded on them. It seems reasonable to conclude that Kenyon may have taken some of the ideas of mind-science and revised them into the Pentecostal system.

In any case, as Bowman points out, there are significant differences between what MS teachers taught and what Kenyon espoused. For instance, the MS teachers said that God is impersonal Mind. Kenyon said He is a Person. The MS leaders interpreted the Bible esoterically and metaphorically. Kenyon interpreted it literally. MS advocates say that sin is not real and that Jesus did not literally die for our redemption. Kenyon, however, said humans are sinners and that Jesus died physically and spiritually for our redemption (including physical healing).

In the 1950s, Oklahoma Pentecostal preacher Kenneth E. Hagin (1917 - 2003) adopted many of Kenyon's concepts. In 1974 he founded the Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma which became, and still is, the primary training ground for Word-Faith pastors and teachers. Hagin claimed that God spoke to him audibly and revealed his ideas about faith which he wrote about in his numerous books and pamphlets. The documented evidence is that Hagin plagiarized much of it directly from Kenyon.

Today, the above listed teachers, and many others, continue to promulgate the ideas of Kenyon and Hagin. Millions of Americans, and other people around the world, faithfully watch these preachers on TV and send millions of dollars to them to support their ministries. In recent years, some of them have been investigated by the IRS and various news outlets. In many cases serious questions have been raised as to the use of funds received and the ethical problems of their lavish lifestyles.

"So, just what is this 'Word-Faith Movement' anyway?" you may ask. In the next installment we will examine its doctrinal distinctives and multiple theological problems.

43. Unmasking the Word-Faith Movement- Part 2

By Tal Davis

In the previous installment we examined the history and major players of the popular modern spiritual movement known as Word-Faith. We mentioned that it is also known by other nomenclatures including the "Word *of* Faith", the "Health and Wealth" Gospel; "Name and Claim It"; the "Faith" Movement; the "Positive Confession" Movement; and the "Prosperity Gospel."

We described the movement's origin in the teaching and writing of early 20th century preacher E. W. Kenyon and how his doctrines were later plagiarized and promulgated by the late Kenneth Hagin. We pointed to a host of well-known television preachers who now continue to preach the Word-Faith message while raking in millions of dollars in donations from faithful viewers. These popular TV personalities include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Charles Capps, Benny Hinn, Fredrick Price, Creflo Dollar, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Rod Parsley, Marilyn Hickey, and Margaret Smith Court. Perhaps the best known and most influential leaders are Paul and Jan Crouch, founders of the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) on which most of the Word-Faith preachers regularly appear.

Word-Faith Doctrine

But now we need to turn our attention to the actual teachings of this movement. We need to understand, first, that not all Word-Faith preachers have the same teachings. In fact many times they contradict each other, and even occasionally their own selves. For instance, Benny Hinn has on occasion publically renounced the Word-Faith doctrines only then to continue teaching them. That being said, the following unusual doctrines are commonly professed by Word-Faith leaders.

Most Word-Faith adherents state that God is a spirit being who speaks "words of faith" to accomplish His will. That is to say, God Himself exercised faith in order to create the universe and everything in it. He continues to exercise this "God-kind of faith" to work in the world today. It is easy to see the flaw in this concept. In order for anyone to exercise faith they must have an object in which to *put* their faith. If we take the Word-Faith concept seriously we would have to assume that God puts His faith in something outside of Himself. Some might even say that God has faith in *faith*. But to take that position means that God is not, in and of Himself, omnipotent. Therefore, He is dependent on something external to Himself, that being impersonal faith.

The Word-Faith teachers carry their logic even further. They say that, although humans have physical bodies, they are also spirit beings. Thus humans were created by God "in God's class" or as "little gods." This means that humans are able to speak "words of faith" just like God does. Humans can potentially express that "God-kind-of-faith", like God has, and can have power over the material world and bring healing and prosperity.

Unfortunately, they say, when humans sinned they lost the ability to express that kind of godly faith. They say that Jesus, who perfectly understood this Word-Faith principle, died on the cross both physically and spiritually to restore our faith to be healthy and prosperous.

So, the Christian becomes, essentially, an incarnation of God like Jesus and can do what he did. She can speak words of faith now to be prosperous and healthy. The key is that she must always "pray-believing." That is, she must pray a "positive confession" with the absolute

expectation that she will get what she asks for. It is her sure and confident word-of-faith that guarantees the answer. Many Word-Faith preachers would say that an important way to increase positive faith is by making a "seed-faith" financial donation to *their* ministry (they rarely encourage viewers to give to their local churches). If the believer doubts, allows negative thinking to invade her mind, or harbors secret sins or sinful thoughts, she will short-circuit the power of prayer and will not get what she desires.

This concept often presents many Word-Faith followers with an agonizing dilemma. They ask, "Since I prayed to be healed and sent in a donation but still suffer with the cancer, does it mean I lack enough faith?" The Word-Faith teachers, if they are true to their principles, would have to answer "yes". Others might complain, "I prayed-believing and sent in a seed of faith gift that I would get the money I needed, but I am still very much in debt. What did I do wrong?" The Word-Faith's answer could only be, "You just don't believe strong enough or you must have secret sin in your life!"

Researcher Robert Bowman, in his biblical analysis of these doctrines, states that they are based on four fundamental mistakes in interpreting and applying Scripture.

Mistake 1: Thinking a good God will give us only good things

Job rightly said that if we accept good things from God, we should also accept it when he takes them away or when bad things happen to us (Job 1:21-22; 2:10). God promises to work all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28); he does not promise that all our things will be good.

Mistake #2: Confusing spiritual and physical blessings

When Paul tells us to set our minds on "the things above" (Col. 3:2), he means spiritual blessings, not a "higher" quality of material life.

The "spiritual blessings" God has given us are adoption, forgiveness, and the like (Eph. 1:3-14), not promises of physical blessings awaiting our positive confession.

Mistake #3: Misreading future promises as present guarantees

Ephesians 2:7 says that God will show us the surpassing riches of his grace "in the ages to come"; the best is yet to come!

In Hebrews 11, faith is not confidence of getting material things now, but rather the assurance of our future heavenly home (Heb. 11:1, 8-16).

God has promised us a life of perfect health and prosperity—in the resurrection (Rom. 8:18-23)!

Mistake #4: Thinking that if we believe what we say it will happen

God's words are inherently powerful; ours are not (Is. 55:11; Rom. 4:16-21).

Human words are powerless, whether we believe them or not (Prov. 14:23; 17:10; 26:23, 26; 29:19).

Human words have consequences as people act on them (Prov. 6:1-2; 18:21).

The Laodiceans confessed that they were rich—but they were wrong (Rev. 3:17)!

(Robert Bowman- Power Point: Biblical Response to the Word-Faith Movement. North American Mission Board)

Conclusion

The 20th Century purveyors of the Word-Faith doctrines, sad to say, made great inroads, especially among Pentecostals and Charismatics. Ironically, its greatest critics were also found within those ranks. A number of Pentecostal Bible scholars publically denounced much of what the Word-Faith preachers proclaim, but with little effect on the rank-and-file membership of their denominations.

Now, in the 21st century, this movement has invaded mainline evangelical ranks. It now poses a serious threat to the spread of the gospel both here and on foreign mission fields because it reduces the credibility of all Christians. Many intelligent non-Christians understand the absurdity of the Word-Faith doctrines and see the scandalous and lavish lifestyles of many of its preachers. They fail, however, to recognize how Word-Faith distorts the truth of the biblical gospel. Therefore, they reject it out of hand.

For this reason, we must continue to expose and reject the Word-Faith movement and discourage Christians from supporting or following its teachers.

44. "The Mormon Saga" By Tal Davis

Given we are now in what my friend Ed Stetzer calls the "Mormon Moment," many people want to know just what Mormonism teaches. They often want to understand the "Grand Narrative" or "Big Picture," if you will, about Mormon doctrine. In this article I will tell you, based on my more than thirty years of studying Mormonism, what I call the "Mormon Saga." It is a story that summarizes the grand mythology of Mormonism as derived from its Four Standard Works (The King James Version Bible, The Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price), LDS temple dramas, and other authoritative Mormon sources. As you read, see if you can discern how this story of salvation history contrasts to that portrayed in the Bible. Remember, the LDS teaches that many "plain and precious" truths were lost in the early centuries after the deaths of Jesus' Apostles. The true church and its true doctrines supposedly were miraculously restored in the mid-19th century by Joseph Smith, Jr., who is the source for these teachings.

Prehistory

Long ago, and in a solar system far away, lived a righteous man named Elohim and is wife. When he died, because of his righteousness and obedience to his father god, he and his wife entered into a heavenly realm called the Celestial Kingdom. After a number of years, Elohim progressed in his power and knowledge and was granted the privilege by his father god of attaining exaltation as a god of his own spirit world. He and his wife now exist as physical gods of flesh and bone.

Elohim and his wife made a home on a planet near the star Kolob. There they began the process, as had their father and mother god before them (and an unknown number of other such gods), of procreating billions of spirit sons and daughters into a non-physical existence. This was the "First Estate" of their children's lives. They named the first-born of those children Jehovah. Jehovah was Elohim's most noble and obedient son and eventually was granted a certain level of

divinity. Elohim was referred to by his spirit children as Heavenly Father (hereafter referred to by that name in this article). Another of the sons of Heavenly Father was named Lucifer.

As time went on and the number of spirit children increased, Heavenly Father decided that it was time that they be given the opportunity of progressing to exaltation as had he and his wife. He decided that, as was done in all previous worlds, he would take some of the eternal matter in the universe and make a new inhabitable world (Earth). This was so his spirit children could be born into bodies of flesh and bone, a necessary requirement for eventual exaltation.

Heavenly Father then called a Great Council in Heaven of his spirit children to present his plan for their future. He told them that they would all be sent to earth to live, become mortal, and be tested as to their worthiness to eventually be exalted. He also indicated that one of them would have to act as a Redeemer to restore immortality to them later. This process was the same as had been done countless times before in the infinite history of the universe. Lucifer volunteered to be the Redeemer. He also stated that he would force all the Heavenly Father's children to be exalted no matter what. They would have no choice in the matter.

Heavenly Father then rejected Lucifer's bid saying that he would never force his children to make the decision to follow him but would allow them to make a choice. They would have free-agency to obey him as he had with his father god. At that point Jehovah, the elder brother of them all, volunteered and was chosen to be the Redeemer. He declared that all the children will be allowed to make their own moral and spiritual choices.

Heavenly Father's rejection of his offer and the choosing of Jehovah as Redeemer greatly angered Lucifer. As a result, he convinced one-third of his spirit brothers and sisters to join him in rebellion against Heavenly Father and Jehovah. This "Great War in Heaven" was eventually won by Heavenly Father, Jehovah, and other valiant spirit children. As a result, Lucifer and the other rebellious spirits were cast out of heaven never to receive bodies of flesh and bone and doomed to eventually be cast into Perdition (Hell) forever. They landed on earth and Lucifer became the devil (Satan), and his followers became the demons who tempt and try to take over the bodies of humans. Incidentally, some of the spirit sons and daughters who did not rebel were nonetheless not valiant in their defense of Heavenly Father. They were given a curse that they would be born physically with dark skin and would be prevented from being able to receive exaltation (Note: this racially tinged teaching was in effect expunged by a "revelation" to LDS President Spencer Kimball in 1978).

This Island Earth

When the "Great War in Heaven" concluded, the victorious Heavenly Father proceeded with his plan. He made the earth from existing eternal matter and then chose two of his favorite children (Michael and an unnamed female) to be the first man and woman to populate it. Heavenly Father formed a human body from the earth, transferred Michael's spirit to it, and named him Adam. From Adam he formed the woman Eve. He placed them in a perfect environment in the Garden of Eden. At this point they were still immortal beings and could have lived forever in that wonderful place.

Heavenly Father, however, gave them two commandments. He first ordered them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for if they did they would lose their immortality and die. He also ordered them to be fruitful and populate the earth. That is, they were to be the first earthly physical parents and ancestors of his spirit children so they could have bodies of flesh and bone and progress potentially to exaltation. This is the Second (and present) Estate of human life.

The two commands presented a dilemma for Adam and Eve because immortal beings cannot physically procreate. So, in order for them to obey the second command, they would have to disobey the first and become mortal and lose the earthly paradise Lucifer, not knowing of the Heavenly Father's plan, was allowed to tempt Eve who ate of the fruit and became mortal. She then gave it to Adam, who, seeing the dilemma and not wishing her to be alone in death, also ate.

Thus, they both became mortal human beings and, though having violated one command, were then able to obey the other and fulfill the Heavenly Father's plan for mankind. So, in reality, Adam and Eve had made the *right* choice. The fall was a good thing after all, for without it we would all be stuck in the pre-existent spirit world without bodies.

Nonetheless, the fall did come with serious negative consequences. Mankind was cast out of the Garden into the "lone and dreary world" of death and decay. However, as indicated before, God had made a plan for mankind to be redeemed and to recover immortality.

Jesus Saves (Partly)

In the course of history in the Heavenly Father's good time, Jehovah, the oldest of Heavenly Father's children and already a divine being, was sent down to earth to be the earthly Redeemer. In order for this to occur, Heavenly Father himself left his heavenly abode to go down to earth (which he does very rarely). He selected a virtuous young woman named Mary to be the mother of his own physical son. Mary willingly submitted and conceived a divinely sired fetus with the spirit of Jehovah in her womb. He had 46 chromosomes, 23 came from Mary and 23 came from the Heavenly Father. When she gave birth she named the boy Jesus, as God had order her to do. Jesus was, thus, the "Only-begotten son of Heavenly Father *in the flesh*."

For 33 years Jesus walked the earth. He lived a sinless life and perfectly obeyed Heavenly Father's commands. Eventually, the time came when Jesus, as the chosen Redeemer, would have to make the payment for mankind's redemption. So, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus suffered great emotional pain even to the point of sweating blood. Then he was taken and nailed on the cross and died. Three days later Jesus arose and won the victory over mortality. As a result, all the Heavenly Father's children (except those who rebelled in the Great War in Heaven) who had died, or will die physically, will eventually be resurrected from the dead with restored immortal bodies. Thus, Jesus' atonement and redemption is universal in its application. Everyone who has ever lived, regardless of their faith or behavior, therefore, will be saved from death.

Judgment and the Three Levels of Glory

The story, however, does not end there. After the future resurrection of all people, the resurrected Jesus will reign on the restored earth for a thousand years. During that time, billions of people will have the chance to accept the Mormon gospel and be baptized. At the end of the millennium will be the Final Judgment where Heavenly Father, the resurrected Jesus, and (some assert) Joseph Smith, Jr. will decide the eternal fate of all humans based on their faithfulness to the Heavenly Father's commands.

Each person will be assigned to live forever in one of three levels or Kingdoms of Glory. This will be the Third Estate. The lowest level will be the Telestial Kingdom. This pleasant place will be, after they have suffered a while to make up for their evil sins, the final habitation of those who were wicked and immoral. It will be a nice place to live, but they will never have the personal presence of Heavenly Father in their midst.

The second, or middle level of glory, will be the Terrestrial Kingdom. This level will be for inactive or lapsed Mormons and people of good will who, though not becoming Mormon,

nonetheless lived good lives on earth. Heavenly Father's presence will not be known there as well.

The third and highest level will be the Celestial Kingdom. This kingdom is the dwelling place of the Heavenly Father. It will be inhabited only by faithful baptized members of the LDS church who have obeyed all the requirements to reach this level of glory. Those requirements include moral living, celestial (temple) marriage, receiving the priesthoods (men only), and receiving the temple endowments (secret rites conducted in sacred LDS buildings that prepare qualified Mormons to enter the Celestial Kingdom). Once a man and his wife arrive in the Celestial Kingdom, if they have been exceptionally faithful and righteous, and if the Heavenly Father sees fit, they may be exalted by him to godhood. They will then start the whole process again in their own world and become gods and goddesses of their own spirit children. Those Mormons not deemed worthy enough to be exalted, nonetheless, will reside for eternity in Heavenly Father's presence along with their intact family members.

45. The Truth about the Mormon Family Their strong emphasis on family is based on their beliefs about eternal destiny. By Tal Davis

The TV scene fades with a husband and wife warmly embracing each other and their several children. An announcer says, "A message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." This short, public-service ad leaves you thinking, "That's what a home really should be; those Mormons sure have good families."

With two church members currently running for President of the United States, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS; also called Mormons) has become, for many, a major issue of discussion. For years the LDS has projected an image of fostering strong, wholesome, and closely knit family units. People of other faiths often are amazed by the apparent stability and size of LDS families. Indeed, the LDS church encourages strong family relationships, lasting marriages, and parenthood. So how do they do it, and more importantly, why?

One way LDS leaders foster these goals is by encouraging church members to participate in a weekly "Family Home Evening." In this program, LDS families are expected to schedule one night a week at home together for a time of study, communication, and fun activities. Local LDS congregations, called wards, are prohibited from scheduling activities that would conflict with the Family Home Evening.

Evangelical Christians commend the Mormons for their promotion of healthy families. Most Christians naturally assume that Mormons stress family relations for the same reasons as other churches. Christians, however, often are shocked to learn of the underlying theological reasons for the LDS church's emphasis on the family.

Families Are Forever

A popular LDS slogan is "Families Are Forever!" That saying, to most people, sounds like a romantic ideal that the love a family shares transcends time. However, Mormons consider it to be the literal truth. They actually believe the family unit is intended to last beyond this life and go on forever.

The Mormon Church teaches that husbands and wives can be married not only "till death do us part," but beyond death into eternity. Families may remain together forever in the "Celestial

Kingdom," the LDS designation for the highest level of heavenly glory. Mormon men and women who are sealed together in private "Celestial Marriage" ceremonies, conducted only in LDS temples, are believed to be joined as husbands and wives forever. Children also may be sealed to their parents for eternity.1

LDS temples (134 worldwide) are consecrated buildings designed for conducting certain sacred rituals, including endowment ceremonies, Baptisms for the Dead, and Celestial Marriages. No public worship services are conducted in LDS temples. Only LDS Church members who are deemed "worthy" enough to obtain a "temple recommend" may even enter a dedicated temple. Mormons are instructed never to discuss the temple ceremonies outside its walls even with other members. Most newly built LDS temples are only open for public inspection for a couple of weeks prior to their formal dedications.2

What surprises Christians even more is that the LDS teaches that husbands and wives who are joined in Celestial Marriage may become gods. Mormons believe they can eventually establish and populate other worlds such as this one, provided they have a Celestial Marriage partner (or partners) with whom they can produce spirit children in the Celestial Kingdom. They believe the Mormon husband can become a "Heavenly Father" and his wife (wives) a "Heavenly Mother" of millions of newly procreated human souls.3

This process, called "exaltation" or "eternal progression," is exactly the way Mormons believe our Heavenly Father became the god of this world. They believe He was once a man as we are now, who, along with his wife, progressed to become God. He is now an exalted man with a physical body of flesh and bone, just one of an unknown number of other gods.4

Mormons also believe Jesus was a spirit child of the Heavenly Father who became another god and was chosen as Savior of the world.5 The Holy Ghost is a third god who has a body of spirit yet exists in the form and likeness of a man.6

Another twist to the Mormon family emphasis is the time, energy, and money spent in genealogical research. Mormons believe it is their responsibility to trace their family history in order to find names of deceased non-Mormon relatives. They believe someone can be baptized on their behalf in the LDS temple in order that the relative can attain the Celestial Kingdom. Dead people may also receive their endowments and be "sealed" in Celestial Marriage by proxy for the same reason.7

Doctrines Strange to Christians

These Mormon doctrines seem strange to most Christians. Many find it hard to believe a church calling itself Christian could teach such things. Nonetheless, these unusual ideas are standard beliefs of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is easy to understand, therefore, why they put such a heavy emphasis on family issues. Mormons believe the family not only is an important aspect of their religious life, but it is essential to one's eternal destiny. One can never progress to godhood in the Celestial Kingdom without a Celestial Marriage and a strong family.8

Christians obviously do not agree with LDS teachings on Celestial Marriage. The Bible certainly teaches that the family is an important element in a person's spiritual life. However, the Scripture nowhere teaches that marriages last beyond death, Jesus actually indicated the opposite is true (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12: 25; Luke 20:35). More importantly, no one's eternal destiny depends on his or her marital status, family relationships, or procreativity. Likewise, the Bible nowhere teaches that people can become gods. The only biblical character who even suggested such a notion was the serpent (the devil) in Genesis 3:5!

Thus, while Christians commend Mormons for emphasizing strong families, they cannot agree with their reasons for doing so. Elevating any institution, even one as important as the family, to a level of such spiritual significance as do the Mormons is a false gospel.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that salvation is a result entirely of God's grace (Eph. 2:8-9). It is received by repenting of one's sin, putting one's faith in Jesus Christ, and submitting to Him as one's Lord (Acts 3:19; Rom. 10:9-10). A major function of the Christian family is to encourage children to receive that salvation and grow in their faith. However, one's salvation is an individual decision that ultimately is independent of one's family status.

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1Achieving a Celestial Marriage (student manual) (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), pp. 129-132.

- 2 Boyd K. Packer, "The Holy Temple" (booklet adapted from book of same title) (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), p. 2. 3Achieving a Celestial Marriage, p. 129.
- 4 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gospel Principles (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), pp. 6, 293.
 - 5 Ibid, pp. 15-16.
- 6 Ibid, p. 34, and Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1985), p. 51.
 - 7 Gospel Principles, pp. 247-252.
 - 8 Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), pp. 117-118.

46. Mormonism Versus Christianity: Can They Both Be Christian?

Part 1

By Tal Davis

Introduction

Some readers may get the impression that I have been beating the Mormonism horse to death with my recent articles on that subject. Obviously, the subject is at the top of the list of religious

issues in America. Why? For several reasons, actually. One, of course, is the public profiles of two current candidates for President of the United States, both of whom are dedicated members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). One of them may quite possibly be elected. While I am not saying we should vote against him for that reason, I do think Christians need to be fully informed as to the worldviews and belief systems of everyone (not just Mormons) who aims to hold that most powerful position.

Another reason is the public influence of a radio talk show host who is popular with evangelicals and regularly talks about his "Christian" faith while quietly advocating social and political ideas that clearly originate in Mormonism. Many Evangelical Christians, unfortunately, fail to look below the surface of what this man says to understand the full implications of his ideas. They like his conservatism but fail to recognize all the implications of his ideas and how they have been influenced by Mormonism.

Perhaps the most important reason why we must educate Christians about Mormonism is that it is growing worldwide and is deceiving even Christians into a false system of faith. I personally have interceded on several occasions to prevent someone from unwittingly being drawn into the LDS. In one recent case I sat down with a young man who was scheduled to be baptized by Mormon missionaries only a couple of days later. At my invitation, he came to my house one evening with the two missionaries and the Bishop (highest ranking official) in the local LDS Ward (congregation). For more than two hours I explained to the young man, in the presence of the missionaries and the Bishop (all who sat stone silent), what they had not, to that point, told him about their church. He changed his mind, thank God.

For these and other reasons, in this two part series I will outline carefully, based on primary LDS sources, what Mormonism teaches and how it contrasts with historic biblical Christianity at almost every doctrinal point. We will begin with the most basic tenet of all.

The Doctrine of God

From the earliest times, Christians have affirmed the ancient Hebrew belief that there is only one God who is Spirit and is the personal, eternal, infinite Creator of all that exists. He is the only God and necessary for all other things to exist. He is omniscient. omnipotent, and omnipresent. The New Testament teaches that He exists eternally as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6-8; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 17:3).

That is *not*, in any sense, the Mormon concept of God. The LDS has taught since the days of its founder, prophet Joseph Smith, Jr., that God (who they call "Heavenly Father") is an exalted man (male human) with a physical body of flesh and bone. Smith said, "If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible - I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 345).

The biblical Trinity is also denied. In Mormonism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are often talked about, but what they mean is three totally *separate* entities or gods. "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us" (*Doctrine and Covenants* [D&C] 130:22). Furthermore, Mormonism is polytheistic, believing there are, along with these three, innumerable other gods in the universe.

This Mormon vision of God is totally outside of the bounds of historic Christianity, including all three major branches: Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox. If fact, the Muslim idea of God is closer to the Christian view than is Mormonism! At least Islam is monotheistic. So then, is

Mormonism Christian? We really don't have to go any further than this to conclude that it is not! Nonetheless, let us continue our evaluation.

The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

All Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the virgin born God incarnate who existed in all time with the Father and Holy Spirit in the eternal Trinity. We affirm that as a man He possessed two natures – human and divine. He lived a sinless life and willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sin of all humanity (see John 1:1-18; 8:56-59; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:13-22; Heb.1:3; 13:8).

Once again, Mormonism has a completely different concept of who Jesus was and is. The LDS says Jesus was the spiritual "first born" Son of God in the preexistence. "Every person who was ever born on earth was our spirit brother or sister in heaven. The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ, so he is literally our elder brother" (*Gospel Principles* [GP], p. 11). "And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn" (D&C 93:21). What they mean is that Jesus was literally the "firstborn" human being born to the Heavenly Father and his wife in a pre-existent, pre-earth life. After him were procreated billions of other children to the Heavenly Parents (including you, me, and Lucifer). Thus Jesus was our "elder brother."

Jesus is special in Mormonism in one regard, however. He was the "only begotten" physical offspring of God by physical procreation on earth. "Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the Only Begotten Son" (GP, p. 64). Thus, in LDS belief, the Heavenly Father impregnated Mary to carry his only *physical* offspring, Jesus. Thus, Jesus was literally the physical "Son of God" and the only person qualified to make atonement for Adam's Fall.

In LDS theology, Adam's Fall brought physical death and mortality to humankind. This, they say, was actually necessary so that humans could procreate other people into the physical realm from the pre-existence. However, because we are in this mortal state, a redeemer was needed to make atonement and restore immortality.

Jesus' atonement (death and resurrection) provides immortality for all people regardless of their faith. "Christ thus overcame physical death. Because of his atonement, everyone born on this earth will be resurrected . . . This condition is called immortality. All people who ever lived will be resurrected, 'both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous' (*The Book of Mormon* [BOM], Alma 11:44, *GP*, p. 74. Also see *GP*, pp. 11, 17-19, 61-77.).

Thus, Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, his death on the cross, and his bodily resurrection only provided salvation from one effect of the Fall of Adam: physical death. *All* people, no matter what their religious beliefs or behaviors, will be raised from the dead at some point in the future. However, their eternal destiny depends on their obedience to the rest of the Mormon "Gospel" (see "Salvation" in next installment).

The Doctrine of Scriptures and Authority

Christianity has, from the time of the Apostles, maintained that the Bible (Old and New Testaments) is the unique, revealed, and inspired Word of God. For Protestant and evangelical Christians it is the *sole* authority for faith and practice for believers (see 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Mormons, however, affirm what they call the LDS "Four Standard Works" as authoritative. These include the Bible "as far as it is translated correctly" (Articles of Faith 1:8). However, Joseph Smith claimed that the Bible we now have was corrupted by the Great Apostasy and therefore is incomplete, corrupted, and not reliable. Though Mormons use the King James Bible, they accept Smith's assertion that there was a need for a restoration of the fullness of the true Gospel through other written and prophetic sources.

So the LDS also includes *The Book of Mormon* (BOM) in their list of Scriptures. Joseph Smith boldly declared it is "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 194). Christian and secular scholars for more than a century have shown that the BOM cannot stand the objective tests of historical or literary accuracy. All non-Mormon researchers agree that the BOM is nothing more than a work of fiction.

Mormons also regard *The Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C) as one of their inspired scriptures. This book, usually published under a single cover with the *Pearl of Great Price*, according to the LDS" is a collection of modern revelations . . . regarding The Church of Jesus Christ as it has been restored in these last days" (GP, p. 54). Joseph Smith, and other LDS prophet/presidents, supposedly received dozens of direct communications from God that were recorded and published in the D&C. The current edition contains 138 Sections (revelations) and two Official Declarations.

Perhaps the most famous revelation in the D&C was Section 132 which authorized the Mormon practice of "plural marriage" (polygamy). Though the section remains in the LDS scripture, it is no longer practiced by that church (Official Declaration #1 suspended it because of US law outlawing polygamy). Nonetheless, a number of small Mormon splinter movements still authorize it.

The final of the Four Standard Works is *The Pearl of the Great Price* (PGP). It is a collection of documents either written or "translated" by Joseph Smith. "It clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the creation of the earth" (GP, p. 54). One book in the collection is called *The Book of Abraham*. It was supposedly translated by Joseph Smith from an ancient Egyptian document he said was written by the Patriarch Abraham while he sojourned in Egypt. It has been totally discredited as a true translation by scholars examining the document.

Though Mormons claim their Four Standard Works are divinely inspired, they do not regard them as the final word. The LDS church's president is regarded as "a seer, a revelator, a translator, and a prophet" (D&C 107:91-92). Thus, he is capable of receiving, just as did Joseph Smith, direct revelation from God. The last such revelation was given in 1978 to then President Spencer Kimball which was published in the D&C as Official Declaration #2. For the first time in the church's history, it opened the Mormon Priesthood to men of African descent.

In the next installment we will examine more of the doctrines of the LDS including its views on humanity, sin, salvation, life after death, and the church.

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47. Mormonism Versus Christianity: Can They Both Be Christian? Part 2

By Tal Davis

In the April 1977 General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons), Elder Boyd K. Packer, then a member of the church's highest ruling group, the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and now President of that Counsel, told the following story illustrating how to receive salvation.

Packer said, "Let me tell you a story – parable. There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt. He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.

"So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn't worry too much about it for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important. The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

"But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full. Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well. 'I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,' he confessed.

" 'Then,' said the creditor, 'we will exercise the contract, take your possessions and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.'

" 'Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?' the debtor begged. 'Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?'

"The creditor replied, 'Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?'

" 'I believed in justice when I signed the contract,' the debtor said. 'It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.'

"'It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,' the creditor replied. 'That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.'

"There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

- " 'If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,' the debtor pleaded.
- " 'If I do, there will be no justice,' was the reply.

"Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also? There is a way! The law of justice *can* be fully satisfied and mercy *can* be fully extended – but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

"The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer. 'I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.'

"As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, 'You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.' And so the creditor agreed."

By now you may be thinking, "The friend must symbolize Jesus who paid the price for our sin debt. He has paid it in full and granted us complete forgiveness. That's wonderful. That's the Gospel (Good News)."

That's certainly how you would expect it to go. End of story, right? Not according to the *Mormon* Gospel. That's just the first phase. Packer continued.

"The mediator turned then to the debtor. 'If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?'

- "'Oh yes, yes,' cried the debtor. 'You saved me from prison and show mercy to me.'
- " 'Then,' said the benefactor, 'you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.' (emphasis added)

"And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken. The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was satisfied" (in Conference Report, Apr. 1977, pp. 79-80; or *Ensign*, May 1977, pp. 54-55).

Apostle Packer's story says the benefactor (symbolizing Jesus we assume) paid the man's debt to the creditor so he would not go to prison. But then he ordered the debtor to pay it back in full to him. What's wrong with that picture? The man was still not off the hook. What if he could not pay back the benefactor? Is that the biblical concept of salvation? Not at all, thank God!. In the biblical scenario the benefactor would know the man could *never* repay the debt. It not only would not be easy, but it would be impossible! His only hope would be the benefactor's (God's) unconditional grace.

In this installment we will examine the Mormon concepts of Humanity. Sin, Salvation, and Life After Death and contrast them to what the Bible says.

The Doctrine of Humanity

The Bible teaches that all human beings are created in God's image, meaning they have personal qualities similar to God's (see Gen. 1:26-27). People can think rationally, have personal relationships, make decisions, and understand right and wrong. God's image does not mean we are like Him physically, since He does not have a physical body (John 4: 24). Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity and worth. The Bible gives no indication that people exist prior to their physical conception.

Mormonism however, teaches that all people are the preexistent spiritual offspring of the Heavenly Father and Mother. "All men and women are ... literally the sons and daughters of Deity.... Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal (physical) body" (Joseph F. Smith, "The Origin of Man," Improvement Era, Nov. 1909, pp. 78,80, as quoted in GP, p. 11). Mormonism says they are born basically good and are "gods in embryo." A commonly quoted Mormon aphorism (attributed to fifth LDS president Lorenzo Snow) says "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

So when the LDS says men are in the "image and likeness of God" they mean it literally. Men are physically the same as Heavenly Father. Women are like the Heavenly Mother (who, by the way, is ignored by Mormons in their prayers, etc.). Furthermore, men may aspire to become like Heavenly Father and be exalted "as gods of their own worlds."

The Doctrine of Sin

Christians believe, beginning with Adam's Fall, that all human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature and pursing life opposed to His essential character and revealed law. This is called the doctrine of Original Sin. It basically says that we are *all* sinners and are cut off from our relationship with God and bound for hell. We cannot save ourselves and are in desperate need of redemption that only God can supply (see Genesis 3; Rom. 3:23; 7:14-25; 1 John 1:8-10).

According to the LDS, Adam's Fall was actually a necessary part of Heavenly Father's plan. It caused a loss of immortality for all humanity which was necessary for mankind to reproduce and advance (see *GP*, pp. 31-34). As Eve declared, according to LDS scripture, "Were it not for our transgression we never should have ... known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient" (*PGP*, Moses 5:11; see also *BOM*, 2 Nephi 2:22-25). So, according to Mormonism, Adam's sin was a good thing. If he had not done so and remained immortal, we would not be here, nor could people progress to godhood. Mormons do believe people still sin. It is not, however, because they have a sinful nature but by willful disobedience to God's laws. Each person is responsible for his or her own sin.

The Doctrine of Salvation

In Christian theology, salvation is release from the guilt and power of sin through God's gift of grace. It is provided through Christ's atoning death on the cross and resurrection and received by personal faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. There is nothing we can do to deserve it or earn it. It is entirely a work of God because of His love and grace. We receive it by repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior (see John 1: 12; Rom. 3:20; 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8-10).

In Mormonism, Jesus' atonement provided immortality for all people. According to their doctrine, Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, death on the cross, and resurrection guaranteed that all people, whether or not they are Mormon or Christian, will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns. This is only the first step, however, for the determination of one's eternal destiny. That is dependent primarily on one's works and standing within the LDS church which will be adjudicated at the Final Judgment after the Millennium.

Exaltation (godhood) is available only to faithful Mormons through moral living and obedience to LDS teachings: faith, baptism, receiving of the Holy Ghost, endowments (secret rituals conducted only in LDS temples), celestial marriage (also conducted in temples), and tithing. Mormons who are not faithful in their personal morality and religious practice will not be exalted. In any case all people, with only a few exceptions, will be consigned to one of three levels of glory depending on their life's behavior.

The Doctrine of Life after Death

The Bible teaches that, at the Final Judgment, those who have trusted in Jesus Christ will inherit the fullness of eternal life in heaven with God. Those who have rejected Christ will suffer eternal separation from God's presence in hell. There is no indication in Scripture that salvation can be acquired after death (see Matt. 5:12-30; 25:41; Hebrews 9:27; Rev. 20-22). Mormonism, however, has a complex concept of eternal life consisting of three levels of eternal glory.

First is exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom for faithful Mormons where people may become gods or angels. "Then shall they be gods" (D&C 132:20). "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God - Wherefore, all things are theirs" (D&C, 76:58-59).

These are some of the blessings given to exalted people:

- 1. They will live eternally in the presence of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see D&C, 76).
- 2. They will become gods.
- 3. They will have their righteous family members with them and will be able to have spirit children also. These spirit children will have the same relationship to them as we do to our Heavenly Father. They will be an eternal family.
 - 4. They will receive a fullness of joy.
- 5. They will have everything that our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ have all power, glory, dominion, and knowledge (See *GP*, p. 302).

According LDS doctrine, baptism for the dead by proxy provides post-mortem salvation for non-Mormons if they received it. It is "by immersion performed by a living person for one who is dead. This ordinance is performed in temples" (*GP*, p. 375). (See also *GP*, chapters 18-23.)

The second level of glory is the Terrestrial Kingdom which is for non-practicing Mormons and righteous non-Mormons. Good people of all religions who have lived descent lives will enjoy eternity in this wonderful kingdom where they will have fellowship with Jesus (but not the Heavenly Father). "These are they who are honorable men of the earth, who were blinded by the craftiness of men. These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fullness" (D&C 76:75-76).

The third level, called the Telestial Kingdom, is reserved for wicked and ungodly people. It is, however, not hell. It is actually a nice place where they will have fellowship with the Holy Ghost (but not Heavenly Father or Jesus).; "These are they who are liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers ... who suffer the wrath of God on earth" (D&C 76:103-104). (See also D&C 76:57-119; 131:1-4.)

Mormonism teaches that only a few people, along with the devil and his rebellious angels (one-third of Heavenly Father's children who rebelled against him in the pre-existence), will go to "Perdition" or eternal hell.

The Doctrine of the Church

Christians congregate together in local bodies and along denominational lines sharing distinctive doctrinal and ecclesiastical concepts. There is no organization or denomination that can claim exclusive designation as the "one true church." The universal church consists of all the redeemed in Jesus Christ in all of the ages (see Matt. 16:15-19; 1 Cor. 1:12-14; Eph. 2:19; 3:11-12).

The LDS strongly asserts that it is the one true church on the face of the earth. Joseph Smith claimed Jesus Christ told him to join none of the existing denominations because "they were all wrong ... that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt" (*PGP*: Joseph Smith-History 1:19-20). Mormons claim only the LDS possesses the divine authority of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthood as restored by God to Joseph Smith in 1829. Thus, full salvation can only be attained by being a faithful and active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*D&C* 13; 27:8- 13; 107:1-20; *PGP*: Joseph Smith-History 1:68-73).

Conclusion

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has for the last couple of decades tried to establish in the minds of the general public that it is an authentic Christian church. However, it is clear from this examination of Mormon doctrine that at every essential point of theology it diametrically contrasts to the doctrines of historic biblical Christianity. As we encounter Mormons, as we will inevitably do given the growth of the LDS, we must resist the temptation to embrace them as brothers, while, nonetheless, showing them the love of God as we seek to win them to faith in the true Jesus Christ.

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Part 5 Fighting the Culture War

48. Fighting the Culture War Against the Odds

By Freddy Davis

America is already much inclined toward a relativistic worldview foundation. Secular Humanism and Postmodernism are now as much a part of the American value system as the Christian faith. Oh sure, most people still call themselves Christians, but the label is not nearly as important as the mindset. And the predominant mindset in American culture now solidly embraces moral relativism. The result of this is evident in the culture and is playing out in every aspect of our society.

We are seeing more and more judges in high positions who make their decisions based on their own value system rather than on the constitutional documents they are supposed to interpret. This ends up turning traditional morality on its head by redefining the meaning of the very words of our language. If a word can mean anything, then people can use those words to legitimize any behavior.

We are electing people to executive offices who hold values which are contrary to the Christian faith. The most high profile person right now is our president elect who has already promised to support homosexual marriage and abortion to the highest degree possible. He is already putting people in place who will make these policies pervasive at every level of society.

We are electing people to legislative offices who hold values which are contrary to our Christian faith. In both the US Senate and House of Representatives, the party which most strongly supports anti-Christian values holds very strong majorities. They *will* enact legislation which promotes policies and activities that run contrary to our Christian beliefs.

Already for many years people, with anti-Christian beliefs have dominated our news media, our educational institutions, and our entertainment industry. These people have thoroughly indoctrinated our children and pacified those who have tried to speak out against them.

So, what are we to conclude from this? If you are a Christian who truly holds to a Christian worldview, you have been dominated. Not just that, but most Christians don't even know how to deal with those who would put them down.

With that as a starting point, what choices do Christians have? There are actually several possibilities. We can tuck our tail between our legs and run away. We can express an uninformed

point of view and legitimately be humiliated by our opponents. Or, we can decide that we have been wimps long enough, learn the things we need to know and get ourselves into positions of influence.

The fact is, the Christian point of view is very powerful. It is 100% defensible. Even more than that, it is capable of overcoming the arguments of every other point of view. But no argument is any good if you don't know how to make it. No position is viable if you are not willing to stand up for it.

The reality is that we Christians, as a whole, simply have not put ourselves in a position to make our case. That is the bad news. But there is good news. The good news is that we can turn this around. It will not be easy and it will not happen overnight, but we can do it. So, what do we need to do to fight this culture war from the position we find ourselves in – where the odds are heavily stacked against us?

1. Recognize Where We Are

We are very blessed to live in America. We often hear this sentiment expressed and have perhaps even said it ourselves. But it is true in some very tangible ways. You can actually be put in jail by the government for becoming a Christian if you live in Iran or Saudi Arabia. If you become a Christian in some parts of India you are very likely to be hunted down by a mob, beaten, and your house burned down. If you live in China you can be hunted down and put into reeducation camps if you meet with other Christians outside of the officially sanctioned church. And this is only a small sampling of the places where Christians are severely persecuted. Yes, we are blessed in America.

That being said, there is a huge attack going on even right here in America. There have been numerous cases where Christians have been arrested or threatened by government or law enforcement officials for sharing their faith on public sidewalks. Some communities have passed laws which do not allow Christian professionals or business people to decline serving and working with people they disagree with on moral grounds. There are places where Christian social service networks have literally been shut down because they would not place children in homosexual homes.

As good as we have it, Christians are being pinched more and more and the prospect for the future is grim. There is virtually no doubt that it is going to become increasingly more difficult for Christians to live out their faith in the marketplace. This is a reality and we must face up to it.

2. Figure Out What We Need to Do

On a macro level, it would sure be good if Christians could speak with one voice to influence the direction of the moral flow in our country. But to do that requires a significant amount of organization on a massive level. Certainly there are organizations which we, as Christians, can rally around to support our values. There are some very good parachurch organizations, such as MarketFaith Ministries, which try to speak for Christians. And many Christian denominations try to speak out for their constituencies. But the fact is, Christianity is so divided organizationally that it is virtually impossible to totally depend on this kind of approach. We ought to use the organizational structures we have as best we can. But ultimately we must depend on our own personal understanding and involvement to accomplish the things God has for our lives.

As individuals, we are called by God to be stewards, or managers, of his world. As such, we need to discover our personal calling and move forward to accomplish that for our own lives.

Normally we use the word stewardship in Christian circles when we are talking about financial matters. But the concept actually has a much broader application.

As it relates to interacting with our culture, God has called us to promote his agenda in the world. He has designed the world to work a certain way and operate by values which reflect his character. Unfortunately, there are other value systems which have become prominent, and which literally go against his purposes. Our primary focus is not to fight culture wars, it is to build the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, one of the side effects of promoting his kingdom puts us right in the middle of the wars. As such, we must be willing to stand up for kingdom values as we engage in the activities which are primary – bringing people into relationship with God. If we don't do this, the culture will develop in ways which literally hinder the progress of God's purposes.

There is not just one single plan that can be laid out which every Christian can follow. God has a calling for each of our lives which we must individually discern. But there are some general categories that we can distinguish. We certainly need to be active in sharing our faith with others. We also need to be aware of the trends in society which are working against God's purposes and do what we can to stand against them. This may involve staying informed politically and sharing our views with those in political power. It may also mean becoming personally involved with our church or some parachurch organization to promote Christian values. Whatever the specifics, we need to sit down and make a precise plan as to how we are going to individually plug into building God's kingdom.

3. Take Steps to Equip Ourselves to Move Forward

Anyone can engage the culture by standing up for what they believe – this includes you. You can get away with being uneducated regarding worldview matters if the people you are dealing with are also uneducated and are at least somewhat sympathetic to your position.

But in our day there are many people who are deeply committed to a non-Christian approach to matters which Christians find offensive and contrary to God's revelation. And these non-Christian positions are becoming more and more prominent in society.

If you are serious about standing up for a Biblical worldview, it is absolutely necessary for you to become equipped to make the arguments. The Christian position is not some fly-by-night point of view which is strictly based on personal preference. There are solid, objective reasons why society ought to operate based on Biblical principles rather than on other worldview positions. These other worldviews promote lifestyles which degrade individuals and society. They create an environment which destroys families and harms the development of children. They promote an ideology which degrades life itself.

The day is past when we can just argue from our gut. We must understand how worldviews filter information, then learn the arguments which promote a culture that matches up with the way reality is actually structured. If you are not able to make these arguments, the train of societal degradation will continue its rampage through the culture.

Equipping yourself involves reading all you can on worldview. It means taking classes about how to deal with the issues which are destroying our families and our culture. It means learning how to share your faith with diverse individuals. It means taking the initiative to make yourself capable of operating in the arena of ideas to promote a culture which is consistent with the ways of God.

4. Enter the Fray

There is one more step that is necessary. Gaining knowledge has no purpose whatsoever if you don't use it. The culture is rapidly going downhill. It is going in that direction because the people who want to promote the degradation are more vocal and more determined than those who don't want to see it happen. They are backing politicians who support their views, they are entering the political arena in areas which allow them to influence the direction of society, they are spending great sums of money to promote their beliefs, they are talking up their position to everyone they come in contact with on every occasion, and they are flooding the media with their beliefs.

If we are serious about promoting our views, we are going to have to do the same thing with the same tenacity. Nothing less will do. Certainly, there will be high profile individuals who take the lead, but it cannot be left completely up to them. The average rank and file Christian is also going to have to enter the fray. You are going to have to do your part.

Conclusion

We are facing a period of time when the Christian voice is in the minority. As a result, promoting a Christian worldview is going to be much more difficult in every way. We will find our views ridiculed, our moral beliefs turned on their head and our ability to influence the direction of society minimized. This does not mean that Christians are in the minority. It is just that we are in a position where people with other worldview beliefs hold the reins of power and influence. This has happened because Christians have become silent in the arenas of influence.

There is only one cure for this – for Christians to become educated, equipped and active in promoting our worldview position. This means learning to effectively share Christ in a way which can speak to every contrary worldview. Of course, even if we don't do this, we will still be in a position to share our faith and faithfully serve our Lord. We will just be doing it in an environment which degrades life and persecutes those who hold a Christian point of view. But if Christians, in large numbers, do what God has called us to do, we can become the mighty force that God intends us to be.

49. The Achilles Heel of Naturalism By Freddy Davis

The ancient Greek myths contain a lot of interesting stories and reveal a lot about how the ancient Greeks understood reality to operate. Essentially they believed that there were many Gods who directly interacted with the material world and humanity to affect the outcome of things on earth. One of the more well-known stories concerned a man named Achilles.

Achilles was actually half God and half mortal. He was conceived when the mortal Peleus, the king of the Myrmidons, had a tryst with a goddess, the sea nymph Thetis. When Achilles was born, Thetis wanted to make him immortal so she held him by the heel and dipped him head first into the river Styx. Every place that the water touched caused his body to became invincible.

However, she was negligent in one place. When she dipped him in the water, she didn't dip down far enough to get her own hand wet. This kept Achilles' heel out of the water and left him vulnerable at that spot.

Achilles went on to become a valiant fighter and was a key figure in the battle of Troy. He personally, killed many Trojans in that war, but was himself finally killed when he was shot in his vulnerable heel with an arrow. The term Achilles heel has since come to be used as an expression which indicates a fatal weakness which an opponent is able to take advantage of in order to defeat an enemy.

Naturalism's Problematic Implications

The Naturalistic worldview, and its various atheistic expressions, have become very prominent in Western societies in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. But we must understand, it is not just the view of God and the supernatural that is affected by this prominence. The implications for society are also quite pronounced. A Naturalistic approach to understanding reality leads to the belief that life has no ultimate meaning or value. As a result, things like abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, genocide and literally any other activity can be deemed okay if the people of the society conclude that it has some value. It is mankind, not a transcendent being, who decides what is right and good.

This kind of belief system also has public policy implications. It has led to such programs as the "one child policy" in China, physician assisted suicide in parts of the United States and several countries in Europe, and government sponsorship of human cloning research. In its worst forms, it has also led to the ovens of the Holocaust in WWII Germany, the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the Cultural Revolution in China and the massacre of millions under Stalin.

Many people who claim to be Naturalists become indignant when this is mentioned because they, themselves, reject the massacres committed in the name of repressive governments. The only problem is, there is no objective reason for this outrage. If there is no objective morality and mankind has to make it up for himself, there really is no reason why a pacifistic view of societal organization should top a murderous one. It is simply a matter of the preferences of those who wield power in the society.

The Dishonest Tactics of Naturalists

In interacting with Naturalists, it is not unusual for them to try and press their advantage by interpreting data to make it appear that the supernatural does not exist. There are several approaches that they use to try and support their conclusions. They do such things as interpret biological and geological data in ways which make evolutionary theory appear to be true, misinterpret Biblical texts to make it seem that there are errors and inconsistencies, expose the hypocrisy and inconsistency of various Christians throughout history to try and discredit the Christian faith in general, and use the brute force of condescension and intimidation to silence Christians. And when pressed concerning the weaknesses of Naturalism, they will simply change the subject.

These various tactics have often been effective in silencing Christians who have not made the effort to fortify themselves with the truth. But the fact is, each and every one of these maneuvers are nothing more than smokescreens to camouflage the inherent weaknesses of Naturalism.

There are times when we, as Christians, need to engage Naturalists at this level in order to correct the record. But the most effective way to deal with the assaults of Naturalists is not at the data level. Rather, we need to work at the worldview level. Naturalism's Achilles heel lies in the fact that its very framework has nothing to support it. And if the framework is wrong, then all of the conclusions which are built upon it will fall.

The Ultimate Problem with Naturalism

Let's begin with Naturalism's basic assumption – there is no such thing as the supernatural. They assert that all of existence can be explained by natural happenstance. From a worldview perspective, there are four issues that deal a death blow to the Naturalistic worldview. Let's take a moment to define those four issues.

1. Why Is There Something Rather than Nothing

The first assumption that Naturalism makes is that since everything is natural, the material universe had to have a natural origin. This is quite a problem for the Naturalistic worldview because there are only two basic possibilities and neither one of them have any supporting evidence.

The first possibility is that matter emerged out of nothing. This is a problem because the whole idea of "nothing" goes completely against the worldview. Naturalism requires that there already be something. In fact, they will often only start their discussion with the "big bang" and simply ignore the question concerning where the material for the "big bang" came from.

The second possibility is that matter, itself, is eternal. This does not mean that it has always existed in the form it is in now, but the energy and material that led to what now exists has always been around. This, too, is deeply problematic as there is no evidence to indicate that this is so.

For Naturalism, the conclusion emerges out of the faith assumption that there is no supernatural, rather than out of any real evidence. In other words, Naturalism is completely based on a set of philosophical assumptions rather than on empirical evidence.

2. Life from Non-life

The second problem with Naturalism relates to the existence of life. To begin with, scientists do not even really know what life is. It is one of those things where you know it when you see it, but no one has been able to identify a way to generate it or prolong it beyond a certain point.

In order to provide an explanation for the origin of life, Naturalism depends on Darwin's theory of evolution. The best it can manage is that given the right circumstances, materials and enough time, life will naturally emerge.

This, again, is purely a faith presupposition. Nothing like this has ever been witnessed and researchers have not been able to demonstrate scientifically that it is even possible. In fact, there is not even a theory as to an actual mechanism that could cause it to happen. Again, the starting point is nothing more than the philosophical assumption that matter is all that exists. With that assumption, the only logical conclusion is that life had to somehow emerge from non-life, but there is no empirical evidence that this is true.

3. Evolution of One Species from Another

The third problem with the Naturalistic worldview relates to how the various forms of life emerged. As we observe the world, it is evident that there are many species of plants and animals. Somehow, all of these different forms must be accounted for.

Once again, Naturalists turn to Darwin's theory to make their case. The only problem is, they are still unable to identify a mechanism which allows for this to happen. The traditional approach has been to credit the process of natural selection for the evolutionary changes. This argument

says that given enough time, the mutation of one species can cause it to evolve into another. In other words, they equate evolution with natural selection.

However, this is simply not true. Natural selection works within a single species but has very strict limits. Various plant and animal breeders have worked with this process for literally thousands of years to produce hybrid outcomes, but they have never produced a new species in the process.

On top of this problem comes the issue of irreducible complexity. The various parts of plants and animals, from the cellular level on up, are so complex that the parts would have had to emerge fully evolved and operational to have the advantageous effects that Darwin's theory requires. This simply cannot happen and, itself, goes against the theory's methodological explanations.

While Naturalists continue to cling to Darwin's theory, it simply cannot account for the complexity of life as we see it. It is another nail in the coffin of Naturalism.

4. Consciousness from Non-consciousness

The final giant problem for Naturalism is to account for the existence of consciousness. Human beings are self-conscious creatures who are capable of self-awareness with the ability to consider complex problems and the implications of those problems.

The Naturalist, once again, begins with the assumption that this must be a natural phenomenon and can, therefore, be accounted for by natural means. The common explanation is that the human brain has evolved to a high enough level to be capable of the computations required for self-conscious thought.

The only problem is, this conclusion has no basis in science. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that consciousness could come from non-consciousness. Again, the conclusion emerges from the philosophical presuppositions, not from the evidence.

Naturalism is a Religious Faith

There is one more point that has been referenced throughout the article but needs to be plainly stated. Naturalism claims that all of reality can be accounted for naturally, yet is itself a faith position. There is no natural reason why reality should be organized the way Naturalism says it is.

- -- Naturalism's assumptions concerning the origins of material reality No scientific evidence.
- -- The assumption that life came from non-life no scientific evidence.
- -- The assumption that one species of life can evolve from another no natural explanation as to how that could happen or proof that it ever has.
- -- The assumption that consciousness came from non-consciousness no scientific evidence.
- -- Naturalism starts with the assumption that there is no God who could have created life. With that assumption, it has no choice but to look for a natural explanation for everything. Science and empirical study are only brought into the picture to try and support the worldview. It is not, itself, the source of the worldview.

What is the Truth?

Something is truth. Either there is a God or there is not. If one begins with presuppositions that are in line with the truth, it should be evident that those assumptions line up with what we actually experience as our universe operates.

If the God exists who is described in the Bible, it is perfectly logical that he could have spoken reality into existence out of nothing. If God is a living person as revealed in the Bible, it is absolutely reasonable that he is capable of creating life on earth. If God created the world as described in the Bible, it completely rational to believe that he created each separate species of living organisms. And if God is who he has revealed himself to be, consciousness had a prior consciousness to come from.

This certainly does not imply that we have all of the answers. There are things about God and spiritual reality that are simply beyond what has been revealed, and likely beyond what we are capable of understanding. But Biblical faith is certainly in line with the way humanity understands and interacts with the material world in a way that Naturalism simply cannot match.

50. The Top 5 Untruths Naturalists Give to Support Their Belief in the Theory of Evolution By Freddy Davis

Occasionally I get into e-mail conversations with people who consider themselves Naturalists or Atheists. Almost always the conversation gets started because one of them objects to my view that the Theory of Evolution if not scientific fact. Of course, the first tip-off that my point is well taken is that it is called the "Theory of Evolution" rather than the "Law of Evolution." But for committed Naturalists, that really doesn't matter. For some reason, they still insist that it is scientific fact in spite of the fact that it isn't.

As these conversations progress, these detractors tend to throw out all kinds of reasons to try and support their belief that the Theory of Evolution is the truth and that what I believe is superstition. The only problem is, virtually every reason they give is not based on science all. In fact, virtually every objection they throw out is based on their beliefs.

It is sometimes tricky to engage someone like this. They really do believe that their beliefs are based on science. They don't tend to know how to make the distinction between the scientific data that they want to evaluate and the worldview belief system they filter the data through. They generally believe that the "facts" and "their evaluation of the facts" are all part of a single package that they call empirical science. In actuality this is not the case. But helping them to see that point is sometimes quite difficult because of the nature of worldview beliefs.

There are a lot of things people will say to try and make their point. Below are my top five and how to answer them. You will notice a lot of overlap between the various assertions. This is because, ultimately, everything comes back to the same problem. Thus, it becomes necessary to make many of the same points to answer the different assertions.

1. The Theory of Evolution Is a Scientific Fact

Those who make the defense that naturalistic evolution is scientific fact don't realize the religious nature of their assertion. For the most part, their Naturalistic presuppositions are all they know. They generally don't even realize that there are other possible worldview filters that empirical data can be run through. But even those who do realize it simply dismiss other possibilities out of hand – not because of scientific observation and experimentation, but because of their belief that any other possibility is based on superstition.

Naturalistic presuppositions assert that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality and that God does not exist. And in their thinking, since there is no God or supernatural reality, the only possibility which can account for the variety of living things on earth is natural evolutionary

processes. Based on this presupposition, they declare that the theory is fact (it is just that we can't yet demonstrate empirically how it works).

So what we have here is a theory based on a set of beliefs, not on empirical science. Naturalists declare their belief to be science because they dismiss out of hand any other possibility which might account for the existence of the life forms. In other words, they define their belief to be science and any other belief to be superstition.

The truth is, science is a methodology, not a set of beliefs. Any worldview position which believes in an orderly natural universe can do science. Christians believe in a universe which operates by natural law, so the use of scientific methodologies is completely compatible with Christian belief. It is just that we also believe that a creator God also exists who has the ability to interact with his creation without disturbing the operation of natural law.

The Christian view of the origin and development of life is a faith position based on the Christian belief that God has revealed himself and his ways in the Bible. We own that position. However, the Naturalistic view that there is no such thing as God or the supernatural is just as much a faith position. It is just that Naturalists don't own their faith. They really do believe that naturalistic beliefs and empirical science are one and the same.

2. Macro-evolution and Micro-evolution Are the Same Thing

A second argument that Naturalists use is that natural selection is the scientifically observable mechanism which makes evolution work. Their belief is that evolution can be actually observed and manipulated in living things (micro-evolution) and that what can be observed in living things can be extrapolated to include the evolution of less complex organisms to more complex ones over a period of millions of years (macro-evolution). The only problem with this is that there is no science known to man which can demonstrate that macro-evolution is even possible.

In fact, what we do see is that there are actual barriers to macro-evolution. For thousands of years farmers and ranchers have bred plants and animals to produce hybrid varieties. They do this to try and make healthier, more useful or more beautiful varieties of living things. But there is a limit that breeders bump up against. After a certain point, they simply cannot go any further. Evolutionary scientists have tried for decades to come up with ways to breach this barrier. It is, after all, the key to demonstrating that natural selection includes both micro-evolution and macro-evolution. To date, however, there is no breakthrough on this front. Macro-evolution remains a tenet of faith, not a scientific fact.

Of course, these scientists have developed various theories as to how naturalistic evolution could have happened. They also take fossil evidence and arrange it in a way to try and show that it actually did happen. But to do this, they still must have some set of beliefs to organize around, and their organizing principles are naturalistic presuppositions. Once again it comes down to their assertion that naturalistic presuppositions are the basis for science and every other set of worldview beliefs are based on superstition. Thus, once again, they push their position by manipulating definitions rather than by demonstrating anything in the lab. They define their beliefs to be the only ones which can be used.

The Christian view is that God really does exist and he created each living organism independently. As such, there is no evolutionary path from one kind of life form to another (macro-evolution). There is the ability of each life form to adapt to its surroundings within limits (micro-evolution/natural selection), but not to go beyond that. Naturalistic beliefs, though, cannot abide the existence of God, so they continuously attempt to come up with means by which their naturalistic beliefs can be affirmed.

3. Science and Naturalism Are the Same Thing

Science is a methodology. It is the process of using observation and experimentation to gain knowledge of the material universe.

Naturalism, on the other hand, is a belief system. Its basis is the belief that the material universe is all that exists – there is no such thing as a supernatural reality.

Since science is purely a materialistic tool, Naturalists have tried to claim exclusive use of it by asserting a dichotomy between science and faith (particularly the Christian faith). As such, they try to promote the idea that science is purely the domain of Naturalism and that no other worldview system can legitimately use it. They reason that since Christians believe there is also a supernatural reality, Christianity and science are incompatible.

What they are missing, though, is that Christians believe in both an orderly natural world and a supernatural reality. Christians firmly believe that God created the natural universe to operate based on natural law which can be observed and experimented upon. The fact that Christians believe God exists does not change that in any respect. Christians also believe that God is capable of interacting with his creation without disturbing the operation of natural law. Because of that, the Christian faith and science do not conflict with one another.

The truth is, if a person were to use purely naturalistic presuppositions, modern science would not even make sense. It assumes chaos and randomness as foundational beliefs. It has no explanation as to how matter originated, how it was able to organize itself and where the laws of nature came from. The Christian faith, on the other hand, understands matter to have been created by God who did so in an orderly fashion. As such, it makes sense that human beings could study and understand it. It is not a coincidence that the original modern scientists were Christians and not Naturalists.

4. The Theory of Evolution Is Not about Abiogenesis

The Theory of Evolution assumes naturalistic worldview presuppositions – that everything in existence can be accounted for based on the laws of nature. In interacting with people who believe in Darwinistic evolution, the topic of the origin of life must, at some point, come up. Based on a naturalistic worldview, the only possibility is that nonliving matter, at some point, was able to form itself into something living for the evolution of life to begin its journey. This development of living organisms from nonliving matter is called abiogenesis – sometimes also referred to as autogenesis or spontaneous generation.

Interestingly, when this topic comes up, the advocates of naturalistic evolution desperately try to change the subject. The usual approach is to simply assert that the Theory of Evolution is not about abiogenesis; evolution is only about the development of life forms that already exist. Unfortunately for them, the two really can't be separated. They are both necessary expressions of the same worldview beliefs.

While, strictly speaking, the Theory of Evolution is not about abiogenesis, the two still cannot be separated. If all of reality has a natural origin, then the living things that exist in that reality had to have originated somewhere. In the naturalistic world, that origin had to be nonliving matter. In a very real sense, it is also the origin of naturalistic evolution itself.

This truth creates a massive problem for Naturalists. There is no science which has ever been able to demonstrate that spontaneous generation of life is even possible. In fact, science seems to demonstrate the exact opposite – that life cannot spontaneously emerge from non-life.

5. Naturalism Is about Fact, Not Belief

Unless a person has made the effort to study worldview, the worldview presuppositions that he or she holds are unconscious. Worldview beliefs form the foundation of an individual's very understanding of reality. The possibility that competing beliefs could be true are virtually unimaginable. As such, it is not surprising that those who hold a naturalistic worldview would think that their beliefs about reality would be true.

But for Naturalists there is an extra matter that contributes to this belief. Since their presuppositions assert that the material universe is all that exists and that it can be completely known by scientific inquiry, the belief that Naturalism is based on fact is reinforced.

The only problem is, Naturalism is a belief system. Naturalists believe that the natural universe is all that exists and there is no supernatural reality. This cannot be verified empirically – it is a faith statement. They believe that matter and energy are either eternal or that they spontaneously appeared – neither of which is empirically verifiable. They believe that life emerged out of non-life – another statement of faith. They assert that lower life forms have evolved to higher life forms – in spite of the fact that this cannot be scientifically demonstrated. They also believe that consciousness emerged out of non-consciousness. Once again, this belief is based on faith, not science.

This fifth point is much like the belief that science and Naturalism are the same. They aren't! Naturalism is a belief system pure and simple. Its foundational presuppositions cannot be known empirically.

Truth vs. Untruth

There is some way that reality is actually structured and it is not structured any other way. Either God exists or he does not. If he does, he exists in some objective form. If he does not, there is some other objective organizing principle for how the universe exists.

Naturalists believe, specifically, that God does not exist and that the universe is, somehow, self-organizing. Of course, they are free to believe this if they wish. But they must also recognize that their belief is not based on science, but on their worldview presuppositions. If they want to demonstrate it scientifically there are four things they must be able to empirically show: 1) An origin for matter and energy (or demonstrate how it can be eternal), 2) how life originated, 3) how living organisms can evolve from lower to higher forms, and 4) how consciousness emerged from non-consciousness. It is not enough for them to make up theories, they must be able to demonstrate them empirically. Until they do, what they assert about these things is nothing more than unsubstantiated "beliefs," not science.

As Christians, our beliefs about the structure of reality are even more defensible than those of Naturalists. It is not that the existence of God and our relationship with him must be defended in order to be true. We can live confidently in our faith even if we are not good at giving a verbal defense. That being said, developing and improving our ability to stand up for our faith has great value both in promoting personal confidence in our faith and in sharing a witness to those who are outside of a personal relationship with God.

51. The Authority Wars

By Freddy Davis

So, you think that the reports of the persecution of Christians in America is overblown? I mean, this is America, right ... the land of free speech and religious freedom?

Well, the increasing attacks on our Christian faith in general and the expression of that faith in particular is increasing exponentially. If things continue the way they are going, it will literally be only a few short years before Christians see persecution like you might expect in a third world nation.

Just recently, in the cover story of the December 15 edition of Newsweek Magazine, we got another glimpse of the tendency. This one does not relate to something that a Christian did and received persecution as a result. Those kinds of cases are bad enough. But in many ways, this is even more sinister. What we have here is the religion editor of Newsweek Magazine, Lisa Miller, writing an article trying to literally destroy the very foundation of the Christian faith.

The article was in response to the states of California, Florida and Arizona voting to codify heterosexual marriage in their state constitutions. Since losing these elections, homosexual activists have been livid and have expressed their anger in multiple ways. We have seen physical assaults on individuals, the sending of terrorist threats to organizations who oppose their point of view, vandalism on the homes of people who supported the amendments, nationwide demonstrations and pressure being put on companies and other organizations to fire people who contributed to the winning campaigns.

The Newsweek article is another Molotov cocktail thrown in this fight. What the religion editor did was to positively assert that the Bible does not say homosexual marriage is wrong, and she maintained that no sensible modern person wants marriage to look like what the Bible describes. There is much more, but essentially what we have here is an all-out assault on the very reliability and authority of the Bible itself.

But that is not all, Newsweek editor Jon Meacham follows up with an editorial backing up the content of the cover article and denigrating "religious conservatives" as out of touch with reality and telling the Christians to "bring it on." In other words, Newsweek has blatantly put its support behind the radical homosexual agenda, and directly and intentionally set itself in opposition to Bible believing Christians.

So, why is this important? It is important because Newsweek Magazine is one of the major instruments of the American media. The power they wield is enormous in influencing people. But even more than influencing people, their voice represents a very large and powerful group of people who are already in place. Since this magazine actually advocates a position which sanctions the putting down of Christians and their beliefs, we can surmise that overt actions to back up that position cannot be far behind.

It is one thing to disagree with an opposing point of view and voice that opposition. As Christians, we do the same thing. But it is another thing altogether to take your opponent's authority source and interpret it in ways which are not consistent with what it actually says. It is absolutely fair to analyze a belief system's authority source and evaluate its legitimacy, but the analysis must be handled truthfully.

A worldview's authority source is the very foundation of its legitimacy. It is in making this analysis that we are able to determine whether or not the belief system represents the truth. If the

authority source validly expresses the truth, the worldview belief is true. If it does not, the worldview falls apart. So, an analysis of the authority is important. But, if the one doing the analysis has an agenda and does not truthfully approach the task, the analytical process becomes malicious and the result is unreliable.

So, what about the Newsweek article? What is the basis upon which the religion editor makes her critique?

When analyzing a worldview authority, the first step is to determine the worldview position that the belief system represents. In this case, Christianity represents a Theistic belief system. Based on that understanding, one must then determine its authority source and break it down to see whether or not it stands up to scrutiny.

In Newsweek's case, however, they never did the first step. They assume Naturalistic presuppositions from the beginning and do their analysis based on that. In other words, they assume from the beginning that the Bible is merely an ancient, man-made holy book and that there is no transcendent God who revealed the content of the book. The way this is approached in the article is that the truths contained in the Bible have to be reinterpreted in each generation to make them relevant to the times. As such, the assertion is that the truth itself is relative. What they have done is to interpret one worldview through the lens of another in order to discredit the one they don't like.

In taking this approach, Newsweek runs into a massive problem. It puts their own worldview in the block for analysis. And when that is done, the Newsweek approach comes up woefully short.

Since, the Newsweek article is approached from a Naturalistic point of view, we must ask, "Where does Lisa Miller get her authority to interpret the Bible the way she does? The short answer is that she made it up herself. The underlying authority for a Naturalistic approach to worldview is human reason. For the Naturalist there is nothing else. They do not acknowledge the existence of anything supernatural, so the natural is all they have to draw on. When it comes to affirming their beliefs, only human beings are capable of contemplating religious ideas, so only human reason is available to draw upon.

But who arbitrates between conflicting interpretations when different humans reason to different conclusions? How does a Naturalist deal with questions which do not have empirical answers? And supposing the supernatural actually does exist, how could a Naturalist even talk about the topic?

The approach of Lisa Miller runs into all of these problems. Her conclusion is an attempt to impose a Naturalistic answer on a belief system which asserts that the supernatural does exist. If she is intent on discrediting the Christian belief, it is not sufficient to simply demonstrate that she can come up with new ideas about how to interpret the Bible based on a different worldview (which is what she tries to do). Rather, she must show that the Bible itself tells untruths (which she does not do).

So, what is the endgame that Newsweek is trying to accomplish? Plain and simple, they are trying to destroy the Christian faith. While this is not the only publication that has turned blatantly anti-Christian, it is a big one. And, as Christians, we better prepare ourselves for the onslaught. This is not a cry to hunker down and try to weather the storm. It is a call to prepare ourselves to do battle. The Christian faith has more to commend it than anything Naturalists can come up with. But our weapons are no good if we do not know how to use them.

I want to encourage you to get up to speed on your understanding of worldview and give you courage as you stand strong in the face of opposition. God's truth is powerful and it will

ultimately win out. But for it to win out in our lives individually, we must stand against those who would try to destroy our faith.

52. A Review of "Love Wins" By Tal Davis

Book Review: Love Wins: A Book About Heaven and Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived by Rob Bell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2011)

I grew up in a theologically liberal mainline Protestant church. Week after week I dutifully attended Sunday school and occasionally went to worship services. When I was twelve years old, I went through the obligatory confirmation class with the other kids my age. As an adolescent and teen I still attended regularly though many of my cohorts drifted away. Most of the ones who remained active were comfortably agnostic.

I remember a lot of questions in church being asked and debated about social issues and national politics, but little being said about God, Jesus, salvation, and especially heaven and hell. The Bible was rarely utilized or regarded with any real authority, since higher criticism had rendered it unreliable. So, by the time I was in high school, I was thoroughly perplexed about what was true and my eternal destiny. Was I good enough to make it to heaven, or was I doomed to hell (or was there even such a thing)? I did not know, and if the subject ever was brought up by me or anyone else, it was rebuffed with a vague sort of condescension. "We don't talk about hell and damnation here", one youth minister sternly told me. To sum up my experience in that congregation, I guess I would have to say I was just plain confused.

Those old feelings were rekindled in my memory while reading Rob Bell's book, *Love Wins*, *A Book About Heaven*, *Hell*, *and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. In eight short chapters Bell gives his views on the issue of the fate of the dead, using much the same ambiguous approach that I remember reading in my earlier Sunday school texts and in sermons I heard as a child and youth.

For instance, Bell maintains that God loves everyone so much that He will never give up trying to reach them even after death and that ultimately He will be successful. This is classical universalism. He seems to consider those who believe in an eternal hell as somehow unloving by presenting a caricature of how some people picture hell. You know, the one with an angry God torturing sinners forever in flames if fire. Bell believes these images are stumbling blocks to many intelligent people's faith in God and may cause them to reject Christianity.

Further, Bell reiterates the age old debate about the fate of the heathen who have never heard about Jesus or the gospel. His answer seems to be that God's saving grace extends to those who, for whatever reason, do not know about Christ. He maintains that they may comprehend Him in other ways and by other names. That is, of course, typical inclusivist and universalist reasoning, like what I was taught as a child.

While I don't pretend to have the absolute solution to that problem, I can't dismiss Paul's appraisal of paganism in Romans 1: 18-32: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." People were judged by the light of the knowledge of God they had, but Paul states that they all universally rejected that light and fell into darkness.

Bell also resurrects old arguments for reinterpreting the Hebrew and Greek words for hell (*sheol, Gehenna*, et.al.). These same arguments have been used for centuries by universalists and annihilationists (egs.: Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists) to discredit the traditional concept of eternal damnation.

I won't try to address all the above assertions here, they have been refuted very well by scholars far more knowledgeable than me (see for examples: *The Life Beyond* by Ray Summers [1959], *Sense and Nonsense About Heaven and Hell* by Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman [2007], or *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Appendix- The Puzzle of Seventh-day Adventism] by Walter Martin [2003 edition, edited by Ravi Zacharias]).

One other issue I need to raise is Bell's apparent view of the atonement of Christ. He seemingly, as I read it, defines Jesus' death on the cross as merely symbolic. That is, he downplays, if not totally rejecting, the sacrificial nature of the atonement. That is, Jesus did not die to make a necessary propitiation for mankind's sins, rather His death was only symbolic of God's overarching love for all people. If I read him right, that is a serious deviation from historic evangelical doctrine.

Sad to say, most of my friends in the church of my childhood long ago abandoned any attachment to Christianity. Most probably remain agnostic, some are atheists, and some drifted into eastern religions and cults. Happily, by God's grace, in high school and college a few of us found our way out of the labyrinth of liberal theology and to the truth of the Bible and confidence of salvation through Jesus Christ. I believe that if I had read Bell's book then, it would have only compounded my confusion and never help me discover the solution to my dilemma.

And that is my main concern with this book: that non-Christian seekers and young Christians, contrary to what Bell thinks, will read this book and never understand clearly the consequences of sin and the need for trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation. That was the case with most of my friends growing up in church. They were not attracted to Christ by maudlin liberal theology, they were repelled, some into the arms of agnosticism and cultism. Love does indeed win, but it must be the kind of love that is based plainly on truth. As John stated "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and *truth*." (1 John 3:18)

53. Is the Christian Faith Really That Exclusive? By Freddy Davis

For some reason, Christians have been singled out by the non-Christian world as being bigots and narrow-minded zealots because of our belief that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. Certainly, they have not mischaracterized our belief about Christ. We really do believe that he provides the only road to salvation.

So does this mean that the criticism has validity? Actually, no! We would only be bigoted and narrow-minded if our claim was false and we were rubbing people's faces in it because we have something that they don't have access to.

First of all, there is every evidence that what we believe is actually true – Jesus was God in the flesh and his death on the cross and his resurrection actually did provide the means for the salvation of mankind. There has not been another person or event which has come along to take care of the sin problem which separates humanity from God.

Secondly, what legitimate Christian would ever rub people's faces in it. Our whole goal is to share the good news of salvation so that they can have it too, not to haughtily assert that we have something others don't have.

So, if we are not really bigoted and narrow-minded zealots, why would non-believers pin that label on us? Well, there is a very good reason why they do it. It is to protect their own very narrow understanding of salvation. Most people who would label Christians as narrow-minded don't really understand the argument they are making. If the Christian understanding is right, then they have to face up to the fact that their own beliefs are wrong – and who can simply let that slide? To protect themselves, they lash out at opposing viewpoints. And with this, we get at the very heart of an understanding of worldview.

The Nature of Worldview

Every worldview belief is, by its very nature, exclusive. In looking at a belief system – any belief system – there is a line which cannot be crossed. It is impossible for there to be a god and not be a god at the same time. If there is a god, it is impossible for him to be personal and impersonal at the same time. In the case of Jesus Christ, it is impossible for him to be the only way to salvation and to not be the only way to salvation at the same time. So, if someone believes that salvation is found by some other means, the Christian viewpoint becomes a target because of the assertion of some other narrow-minded viewpoint.

With this understanding in place, it seems a bit disingenuous for someone to assert that our Christian view is narrow-minded from the platform of a different narrow-minded point of view. But that is exactly what has happened when someone attacks our faith in that manner.

What Defines Exclusivity?

If some belief system is going to be called exclusive, we must understand what is meant by that before the charge makes any sense. The fact is, every belief system in existence (even those which pride themselves on being open and tolerant) has a line around it which defines the boundaries of the belief. As long as you stay within the boundaries you are a part of that system. When you move outside of that boundary, you have moved into something else. Because of our understanding of worldview, we actually have a way to get at that. There are three basic things which define the boundaries around a belief. These can be identified by asking three questions.

- 1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?
- 2. What is the nature of a human being?
- 3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

Every belief system answers these questions and the answers define the system's exclusivity. So, when someone claims that Christianity is narrow-minded, the claim is made based on the doctrine of some other narrow belief system. The person making the charge may believe that their belief is not exclusive but, by default, it has its own line around it.

How Is Christianity Exclusive?

As we mentioned before, Christians embrace the "exclusive" label. But it is not that we are exclusive in order to keep people out. In fact, we want as many people as possible to enter into our faith. But we do recognize that there is a particular way for people to enter the faith. So just how does the exclusiveness of Christianity play out? How does it answer the three questions above?

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?

For a Christian, ultimate reality is expressed as the God of the Bible. He is the creator and sustainer of the material universe. He is holy, righteous and just. For his own purposes, God created mankind for fellowship with himself. In eternity, human beings will either live in the presence of God or outside of his presence.

2. What is the nature of a human being?

Christians understand human beings to be persons created in the image of God, but who are tainted by sin because of the fall. This has caused individual humans to be separated from God because he cannot dwell in the presence of unholiness.

3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

Salvation then, for Christians, is the means by which the problem of separation from God is fixed. It was accomplished by the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. It is specifically applied to individual human beings as they acknowledge their sinfulness and invite Christ into their lives.

Now, certainly, that is specific enough to garner the label "exclusive." It is only through Christ that a person can enter into a relationship with God.

How Is a So Called "Non-exclusive" Belief Systems Exclusive?

There are many belief systems which point to Christianity and claim that we are exclusive, believing that they themselves are not. It is impossible to detail all of these, but one example will highlight how to analyze all of the rest. For this example, we will use Secular Humanism.

Secular Humanists really believe that they are open minded because they don't force people to believe a particular way about God (or even to believe in God at all). But is that really the case? Here is how Secular Humanists answer the three questions.

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Secular Humanism asserts that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality. Everything that exists is the result of natural evolutionary processes.

2. What is the nature of a human being?

Human beings, for Secular Humanists, are simply the naturally evolved animal creature which has developed the most complex brain. Humans are nothing more than highly evolved biological machines.

3. What is salvation and how do you achieve it?

For Secular Humanists, salvation is nothing more than personal self-fulfillment and the structuring of society in ways which insure the survival of the species. Since there is no transcendent existence to impose purpose or meaning on the material world, it is up to individuals and society to determine what constitutes personal self-fulfillment and how to best insure species survival.

Does this have a ring to it of open mindedness? Does the fact that there is no religious or revealed authority mean that Secular Humanists are more "tolerant" because they don't look to God for guidance?

Not really. In fact, they are very intolerant of anyone who does not answer the three questions the way they do. They are intolerant of any person who believes in God. They are intolerant of any person who views mankind as a purposefully created individual. And since, for them, salvation involves their own personal self-fulfillment, they are intolerant of anyone who stands in their way, no matter what arena of life this involves. By the same token, many of them don't have any qualms about walking on others or putting others down if it furthers their own personal advancement. The fact is, Secular Humanists have a very narrow-minded approach to belief and anyone who does not agree with them is considered to be ignorant and wrong.

Is it the Truth?

While we used Secular Humanism as an example, you can use the three questions to get at the narrow-mindedness of any belief system, no matter how "inclusive" they claim to be. But this is not even the real issue at hand. The real question is not, "Is it exclusive?", but "Is it the truth?"

There is some way that reality is actually organized. Either there is a God or there is not. If there is, he is either personal or impersonal. You can't have it both ways. So, someone is right and everyone else is wrong. Claims of tolerance and open-mindedness are totally meaningless if the claims don't correspond with the way reality is actually structured. Of course, there is no empirical evidence that one belief system or another does represent truth. Worldview beliefs cannot be addressed that way. But there are other kinds of very powerful and profound evidence for or against every belief.

The fact is, our Christian faith has more evidence to support it than any other belief system in existence. It is not narrow-minded to make a belief claim if what you are claiming actually does represent the truth.

For the Christian faith, the focus is not on the fact that Christ is the only way to God. While this is a true statement, the real issue is much more important. Human beings exist in a condition where we are separated from God. We desperately need a means of fixing that problem. God provided that fix through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather than being upset that there is only one way to God, we ought to be very grateful that God provided a way for us to escape the death trap of sin.

The exclusivity of Christianity is not oppressive - it is freeing. It is the message that there is a way for us to escape slavery from sin and eternal separation from God. Every belief system in existence is exclusive and we have to come to grips with that fact. The important thing to discover is, which exclusive set of beliefs represents the truth? Once we know that, narrow-mindedness becomes a blessing, not a curse.

54. God's Part and Our Part in the Culture Wars

By Freddy Davis

What Do We Mean by Culture Wars?

As Christians, how should we interact with the world as it relates to the culture wars? Should we fight for what we believe is right based on the teachings in the Bible? Or, should we not

concern ourselves with the things of this world and focus our attention on worshiping God at church? Should we confront non-believers with what the Bible teaches about various social issues, or should we just quietly live godly lives in front of them and depend on God to prick their consciences?

The answer to these questions is yes and yes and yes! There is a part that we have to play in the execution of the culture wars and there is a part that God must play. Problems come about when we don't know how to distinguish between our part and his part. God has given believers a role to play in building his kingdom on earth and he primarily works off of that to accomplish his purposes. It is not that he cannot work without us, but he has chosen primarily to work through us.

With that concept firmly in place, we must also acknowledge that there is a part that only God can do. When we understand the difference in the two arenas and focus on accomplishing our part, God will effectively work through us. When we get the roles confused, we end up trying to do the right things for the wrong reasons and God is not able to effectively use us.

But before we are able to carry out solutions, we must first make sure that we know what we are dealing with when talking about the concept of culture wars. Just what does this mean, anyway?

Culture wars occur in the places where opposing worldviews collide in society. In modern America this is an increasing phenomenon. There are many expressions of the culture wars. Most of these, though by no means all, are battles between the Naturalistic and Christian worldviews.

Some of the more prevalent expressions of the culture war include:

Abortion - Those who believe that life is a gift of God and that it begins at conception understand abortion to be wrong. Those who believe that there is no God and that living beings are nothing more than natural animals do not value life as highly. They tend to believe that a fetus is nothing more than a blob of tissue and see nothing wrong with aborting one if having a baby would be inconvenient for the mother.

Homosexual Marriage - Those who believe that the union of a man and woman constitute God's right and natural order for the basis of human society, understand homosexual behavior to be wrong. Those who don't believe in God tend to value human desires above all and do not see anything wrong with turning marriage into something else.

Human Cloning and Embryonic Stem Cell Research - Those who believe that life begins at conception and is a creation of God assert that human beings do not have the right to manipulate or kill human life in order to further medical research – no matter how noble the intentions. Those who believe that life is a completely natural phenomenon claim that there is nothing particularly sacred about human life and any kind of medical research is acceptable.

Euthanasia and Doctor Assisted Suicide - Those who believe that the giving and taking of life is only the prerogative of God will be against these ideas. Those who do not believe in God and consider this life to be all there is have no problem with human beings deciding for themselves what is acceptable regarding end of life issues.

There are, of course, many other issues which are currently being dealt with in the culture wars of modern society. The ones above, however, serve to illustrate the point.

Why Fight the Culture Wars?

Before we go any further with this, we need to answer one other question. Why is it important for us to fight the culture wars? Many will argue that it is nobody's concern what "I" do. Others assert that, "If it doesn't affect anyone but me, what harm is there?"

The problem is that there is a massive fallacy in these kinds of arguments. There is the presumption that what one individual does has no effect on others. This is simply not true. The behavior people engage in does have an effect on other people. An abortion may make life more convenient for the prospective mother, but it kills the baby. Embryonic Stem Cell Research may hold out hope for some people, but it kills a baby.

But this whole matter goes beyond effects on individuals. Each issue has a profound effect on society, as well. The prevailing point of view in a society regarding any of these culture war issues affects what people do in the society. When abortions are legal, more babies are killed. When homosexuality is normalized, more children grow up without a mom and dad and more people get into that lifestyle. When euthanasia and doctor assisted suicide are legitimized, more people will die, even many who do not need to. It can certainly be said that sanctions do not completely eliminate bad behavior and activities, but they do cut down on it and dissuade more people from participating. The more acceptable something is to a culture, the more there is of it. And all of these bad values create a drag on society which affect even those who do not participate.

The Role of Christians in the Culture Wars

There is a way that God established the world to operate. This right way includes a high value on life, a specific purpose for marriage, a specific understanding of sexual morality and a way that individuals and society ought to act in relationship to God. And Christians do have a part to play in the culture wars. Society is going to reflect some set of values – either the values of God or the values of humanity apart from God. The dominant set of values will take the society down a particular road. When the values of God are the prevailing structure, people are provided an atmosphere where they can flourish. When the structure is contrary to God's ways, more people go in directions which degrade society.

As Christians, we ought to be interested in promoting the purposes of God. And when the interests of God are being trampled, we must stand up on God's side. To do this, we don't simply make up what we want to be for or against. Our focus must be based on a Biblical mandate and revolves around such issues as the value of human life, marriage, human rights, fairness, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, rule of law, justice, and the like. This does not mean that we are looking to create a Theocracy where some church or religious leaders head up the government. Rather, we are looking to promote values in society which reflect the character of God rather than some other character.

As a result, Christians ought to be actively involved in promoting the values we agree with in the culture. To do this we need to be active in sharing our faith to bring others into a relationship with God. We also need to be vocal in the political process by voting, talking to our legislators, writing letters to the editor of the newspaper, supporting the right people for political office and perhaps even running for office. As was said before, some value system will prevail in society. We need to be active in promoting the values which correspond with the character of God.

The Role of God in the Culture Wars

While we need to be actively involved in promoting God's ways, there is one thing that we are incapable of doing – changing people's hearts and minds. As much as we want to see our society serving God and adhering to the values of the Bible, we human being are incapable of changing other people's hearts. We can be an influencer, but actual change occurs within the heart and mind of the individual.

The reason that this is important is because generating laws which run contrary to the values of the majority of a population only invites backlash. This principle was seen very concretely back during prohibition. A groundswell of support for anti-alcohol laws was able to sweep in a national prohibition law which outlawed the sale of beverage alcohol. But in spite of the ability of anti-alcohol forces to enact the laws, they didn't do it in a way which convinced the general population that the laws were a good idea. A very few years later, the law was repealed and the availability of alcohol became more widespread than ever before.

We certainly do need to advocate for laws which reflect God's values, but we must do it in ways which also bring people into a mindset which agrees with the laws. This requires that people have their lives changed by a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Instruments in God's Hands

While only God can change a person's heart, we can be instruments of God's working. There certainly are cases where God somehow directly confronts individuals in ways which influence them to turn to him. But the more usual method of God's working is through believers. Typically, God uses believers to get people's attention as they share their faith. Once God has an individual's attention and he or she opens their lives to him, their lives, and thus their values, change.

As Christians, God uses us to bring attention to the need for society to be based on values he has revealed in the Bible. He then uses us to promote those values in society. At the same time, he uses us to share our faith with non-believers so that they can come to know him. When enough people in a society respond to God in their lives, the majority opinion reflects the values of God.

Christians are responsible for being instruments in promoting God's values in the world. But that responsibility is not absolute. Rather, it is a partnership with God to not only change society at large, but also to change the hearts of individuals. At that point, the values of God become prominent and the Kingdom of God comes on earth as it is in heaven.

55. The Social Justice Debate

By Freddy Davis

What a fascinating fight has emerged in our society. And the really intriguing part is that currently it is being fought on the battleground of the Christian community. The issue under dispute is actually not a surprise among Christians who are actively engaged in culture war battles. But it seems to have caught the average Christian by surprise. In fact, most have not even been aware of the significance, and perhaps even the existence, of this battle until it suddenly burst forth in the public arena. This fight has to do with the topic of "social justice."

When a national talk radio personality recently made disparaging remarks about churches which promote social justice, the water hit the fan. At that point, a group of Christians reacted vehemently against him – particularly those who were associated with theologically liberal forms of Christianity. But, to be fair, there were a lot of other Christians who reacted, as well. So, why the strident reactions? Seemingly, the reasons are twofold. One reason relates to uninformed Christians who didn't realize the special meaning of the term social justice, and the other to the theologically liberal Christians for whom it has a very specific meaning.

The real problem is in the term, "social justice," itself. On the surface, this seems to be a benign reference to something that Christians are admonished to, and have been involved in, from the very beginning of the faith. Christians have always been engaged in serving and helping the poor. And when applying that kind of meaning to the term, no Christian would have any problem with it. But for those who specifically build the practice of their faith around the term "social justice," an entirely different meaning emerges.

This term was actually coined by a Jesuit priest named Luigi Taparelli in the 1840s and came to describe a particular means of moving towards a socially just world using government mechanisms. This particular approach related to politically left, and even socialist, ideas of moving society towards social equality, and was based specifically on a Naturalistic worldview foundation.

Over the next several decades the concept of social justice was expanded to include such ideas as a living wage, human rights, economic equality through progressive taxation and the redistribution of income and property by taking from the rich and giving to the poor. In effect, it put a focus on achieving equal outcomes for all people rather than on equal opportunity. Social justice worked its way through various left leaning political, educational, and social institutions before eventually making its way to liberal churches whose theology centered around a social gospel rather than on salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The interest Biblical Christians have in this topic relates to the worldview foundation that informs the two different approaches. In a Biblical worldview, it is not just the ends that matter. For Christians, it is not okay to use bad means to accomplish a good end. For instance, it is not okay to murder abortion doctors in order to prevent abortions. By the same token, the means of providing social justice is as important as the end result. You can't do the work of God using methods which run contrary to God's character.

The liberal Christian version of social justice believes that it is right to achieve social equality by taking from those who have and giving it to those who are less fortunate. In order to achieve this, they believe that using the government as the mechanism to accomplish this goal is okay. The concept is to support the transfer of wealth using high taxation of those who are productive in order to provide food, shelter and medical care to those who are not productive. In any other arena this would be called stealing. But this kind of "taking from the rich to give to the poor" is somehow justified in their minds if it is done by the government rather than by private individuals. Regardless of the mechanism, this does not come from a Christian worldview.

Another problem with this approach is that the focus is put completely on the physical as opposed to the spiritual needs of the individual. Based on a Naturalistic point of view, the physical needs of individuals are an end in themselves. This perspective, also, is not derived from a Christian worldview.

The Biblical version of social justice certainly asserts that Christians ought to do what they can to support those in need. But rather than using the government as the instrument of that help, emphasis is placed on voluntary aid given by individuals who do it because they want to. And

Christians, because of their desire to follow the teachings of Christ, want to. As such, Christian believers have been instrumental throughout history in providing for and helping with education, health care, disaster relief and many other kinds of aid. And all of this is not done simply to make physical life easier for those who have less, but as a part of sharing with a lost world the love of Christ.

The Bible is very clear that the purpose of God for the people of the world is not centered in the material. In Matthew 26 we read the story of the woman who poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Immediately, the disciples became very indignant that this perfume was wasted since it could have been sold and the money used to help the poor. But Jesus, himself, fired back in defense of the woman and said, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." In saying this, Jesus was not implying that the material situation people live in is irrelevant. But he was asserting that it is secondary to the real purpose of God — which is to know him.

Christians are admonished to be good stewards of the resources God has entrusted us with. We are to use those resources to accomplish every part of God's purpose, which includes helping those in need. But in helping them, the real goal is to build the kingdom of God, not merely to provide for people's physical needs.

Ultimately the Christian expression of social justice comes down to purpose. The liberal Christian sees it as an end in itself. But the Biblical worldview asserts that it is an expression of the purpose of God in building his kingdom.

And the end result of each purpose is dramatically different. The social justice of the liberal Christian takes from one to give to another in order to make earthly life more comfortable for the one who has less. The social justice of the Biblical Christian serves God as individuals steward his resources in ways which build his eternal kingdom.

When it is defined in a way which runs contrary to a Christian worldview (which is the case in liberal Christianity), social justice does nothing to bring people into relationship with God, and actually becomes an evil means meant to promote a good end. When defined based on a Christian worldview, God uses his people to accomplish his eternal purpose using means which correspond with his very character.

56. How to Fight When We're Right By Freddy Davis

Recently I came across an internet forum that was started by a college student who was struggling with whether or not a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation was true. It seemed to me that this was causing a bit of doubt to enter his mind.

A number of people responded to him who had various takes on this topic. Some were telling him that, "Yes, a literal interpretation of Genesis was a correct interpretation." There were others, however, who were trying to espouse a scenario in which he could keep his faith but still believe in Naturalistic evolution.

Of course, I had to throw my two cents worth in, as well. I shared, though, from a worldview perspective, beginning with the point that a Biblical position and a Naturalistic approach simply were not compatible. It is possible for a person to throw out both, but you can't, with consistency, combine both. Reality is only structured in one way and hybrid approaches are internally contradictory.

As a Christian, I am convinced that the evidence is clear. The Christian faith represents the truth about the nature of reality. It reflects the way things really are. It expresses the truth about who God is, what he is like, what he wants out of us, the nature of man and how we can know God in a personal relationship.

If what the Bible teaches is, indeed, true, what Christianity asserts is a literal, objective truth. It is true whether we recognize it or not, whether we believe it or not, and whether we understand it or not.

As human beings, we have to interact with that truth, and various people deal with that in different ways – including Christians. Some Christians are not confident at all about their faith, so they keep it completely to themselves. Others are not confident about what to say in order to share or defend their faith, but boldly claim it anyway.

But I believe God wants Christians to deal with this in a different way. I am confident that he wants us to express that truth to a world that doesn't know or denies it. And he wants us to do it in a particular manner – intelligently and confidently. We can only do this when we have built a knowledge foundation that allows us to have that confidence. So, just what does this foundation look like?

Worldview

The first component of the foundation is a general understanding of worldview. Traditionally, this is not a topic that has been a part of the information base that Christians have worked with. In fact, it is a relatively recent addition to the mix. The reason this is so is that this kind of knowledge was not necessary in previous times because of the makeup of American society. While there has never been a time in modern America where a huge majority were faithful and committed Christians, there was a time, up until the mid to late twentieth century, when most Americans at least held a common belief that the God of the Bible existed.

Sadly, this is simply not the case anymore. Now, we live in an increasingly pluralistic society where Biblical beliefs are a minority position. It used to be pretty much that the only people who had to deal with those who held other worldview beliefs were missionaries who lived in other, non-Christian, countries. Previously, Americans didn't need the missionary tool box of skills. But now they do. And an understanding of worldview provides that knowledge. If Christians today are serious about their witness in the world, an understanding of worldview will be a necessary part of that package.

Christian Worldview

Understanding the components of our Christian worldview is actually a traditional component of training in Christian circles. After all, what we are talking about here are the basic teachings of the Christian faith. What is missing, though, is putting that training in the context of a general understanding of worldview. This context allows us to not only know what we believe, but why we believe it.

Again, in past times, this "why" component was not nearly as critical. That is because there was not much opposition to deal with. Now that there is fierce opposition, a mere knowledge of what we believe is not sufficient. We must also know why. As such, we need to grasp a Christian understanding of faith in the context of a general understanding of worldview. The result of not having this kind of knowledge is very evident as we see our young people falling away from their faith in record numbers because they don't know how to answer the challenges that are put in front of them in our post-Christian culture. If Christians today are serious about their witness

in the world, a knowledge of the Christian faith in the context of an understanding of worldview will be a necessary part of that package.

Relationship with God

A third component of a solid faith foundation relates to how our knowledge base is translated into daily life. It is very easy to think of God in impersonal terms. And that is certainly a serious problem. But an even greater problem is maintaining a personal interaction with God in the midst of a society that doesn't recognize the personal nature of God.

The Christian worldview asserts that God is a real person who can be known in a real personal relationship – in the same way that we can have a personal relationship with other human beings. But many Christians simply don't know how to do that. This is something that has to be retrieved. If Christians today are truly serious about their witness in the world, mastering our personal relationship with God is a critical skill to develop.

How to Share a Witness

The fourth and final component of a solid faith foundation for Christians relates to our ability to share an effective witness to our faith in Jesus Christ. We need to be able to share who God is and how other people can know him personally. This is much harder now than it used to be because we have so many more people whose established faith position is based on a different worldview foundation. This causes them to not only have different doctrinal beliefs, they have an entirely different understanding of how reality is organized.

In terms of Christian witness, this means that we have to have a different kind of understanding of the nature of witness and a new set of skills to effectively share the gospel. It used to be that we could start with an assumption that people already believed in God. And almost without exception, all modern witnessing methodologies start with that presupposition. But that assumption is simply not true for an increasing number of people in our day. Thus, we need a broader foundation for our witness. Not only do we need to know the actual message of the gospel, we also need to understand other people's worldview foundation along with the doctrines of their faith. If Christians in our day are truly serious about their witness in the world, mastering the worldview and doctrinal beliefs of those we want to share with is absolutely critical.

What Do We Do When We Have the Foundation?

Business as usual will not do in our day. We must take it up a notch. And this is exactly what an understanding of worldview will do for us. It gives us the tools to be an effective witness in our increasingly pluralistic world. It actually does two very powerful things for us. It allows us to live personally in the presence of God and to be confident in sharing a witness about Christ.

When it comes to an understanding about the true nature of reality, the Christian faith has it right. But the fact that we claim to live in that truth does not necessarily mean that we are expressing it in our lives in a way which allows us to be faithful in our witness for Christ. We have to start by doing our due diligence. We do this by establishing a knowledge base which allows us to understand our own faith as well as the faith of others. Then, we have to take it to the world with confidence and actively share it. Without both of these components we cannot do the work that God has called us to – no matter what we claim to believe. God has given us a revelation which expresses the truth. He has given us himself to empower our lives. Now, it is up to us to take those gifts and live it out in life.

57. America's Worldview Trends

By Freddy Davis

What Has Happened to America?

George Barna has recently released survey results that confirms what most active Christians have become aware of based on their own personal experience. In surveying Americans and analyzing the results over the last 20 years (from 1991 - 2011), he finds that Bible reading is down from 45% in 1991 to 40% in 2011. On top of that, he found that:

- -- Church volunteerism has dropped from 27% to 19%,
- -- Adult Sunday school attendance is down from 23% to 15%
- -- Adult church attendance is down from 49% to 40%
- -- The number of unchurched has jumped from 24% to 50%,
- -- The number of people who believe that God is "the all-knowing, all powerful, and perfect -- Creator who still rules the world today has gone from 74% to 67%, and
- -- The number of people who believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches has dropped from 46% to 38%.

So, why has this happened? What has turned America from a Christian nation to a post-Christian nation? What has happened to us?

Simply put, America's worldview foundation has shifted. Of course, America has never been 100% Christian. There have always been pockets of people who have belonged to other religious groups. There have also always been large numbers of people who, even though they culturally identify themselves as Christians, have never invited Christ into their lives. But, until our modern times, American values and ways have been Christian values and ways.

This is simply not the case anymore. Beginning in the 1800s and increasing throughout the 1900s, Naturalistic belief slowly, then more rapidly, gained prominence. It did this by infiltrating our educational institutions, our news media, our entertainment industry and our political system. And it was ultimately so successful that today it dominates all of these. This Naturalistic belief is not merely a set of intellectual beliefs, but literally shapes the environment that we live in based on an entirely different set of values. It doesn't acknowledge the existence of God, and thus the moral beliefs of Christianity are not accepted. This is why we see such depravity in the entertainment industry, disdain for God in our educational institutions, put downs of the Christian faith in the news media and relativism of every sort expressed in our political institutions. This is now the world we live in.

What is the Cure?

So, what is a Christian to do? Now that we are outnumbered in virtually all of pop culture and outmaneuvered in other areas of life, what is the solution?

While there are certain difficulties that go with living life as a minority, we are not in a hopeless situation. First of all, we know the end of the story. Even though we have to endure difficulty now, God wins in the end. We have that assurance.

We also know that we are not alone in what we are experiencing. This is not a new phenomenon. There are many places around the world, and there have been many times in history, when Christians have been in this situation – or worse. God has given us our marching

orders. And in our case, we still have the possibility of exerting a lot of influence in our society if we will be faithful. So, just what does that involve?

1. Do Our Due Diligence

Doing our due diligence means that we must seriously buckle down and master the basics of our faith. A solid Christian education is not something just for professional Christian leadership. The special training Christian leaders need is knowledge in how to most effectively equip the rest of the body of Christ for ministry – not simply knowledge in how to do all of the ministry.

If we truly believe the Bible when it says that all believers are kings and priests, then we must train ourselves to be effective in that calling. Every believer is called into full-time Christian ministry. There are some who are called into church leadership and those become pastors and other church leaders. But this does not take away from, or minimize, the calling of believers who work in other vocations. There is a distinction that must be made between our calling and our profession – they are not the same. We are called to be faithful witnesses through actively working in our profession.

Every Christian needs to become proficient in Bible, theology, and the basic Christian skills (prayer, Bible study, worship, meditation). To pull that off requires a lifelong commitment to study and training.

2. Honestly and Actively Live out Our Faith

While knowledge is the first step (we can't act without knowledge), it is only a beginning. Our attitude about our faith is also critical. It is possible to have all of the right knowledge and it not lead to a vital relationship with God. There are many people who have advanced degrees in Bible but are far away from him. Knowledge by itself is impersonal.

But a relationship with God is personal. We must learn how to walk with him, communicate with him and express our love and devotion to him. There is a profound difference in knowing about someone and actually knowing them.

3. Share the Truth of the Gospel

The third and final part of the cure is to express our faith. We can't do this effectively without doing our due diligence in gaining the necessary knowledge and having a personal connection with God. But it is possible to have the first two and not be faithful in this last part. Christ has literally called and commissioned believers to share our faith with those who don't know him. Mankind's very reason for existence is for relationship with God. And he has called us to partner with him to bring others into this relationship.

Living in the Trends

I suspect that the biggest problem Christians have in living out the Christian life in a hostile world is not that we don't know what to do. The Bible is clear, and even our consciences affirm what we ought to be doing. The problem is that we don't put ourselves in a position to actually accomplish what we know we ought. We need to do our due diligence, live out what we know and share Christ with those who don't know him.

America is trending in a wrong direction. Are we serious about wanting it to be different? We will never turn things around until a large number of Christians begin to take seriously the call and commission of God and take the steps to implement the necessary elements in our lives.

58. The Spiritual Nature of the Culture War

By Freddy Davis

Most Christians are keenly aware of the culture war that exists in today's society. It is obvious in the societal battles over abortion, homosexual marriage, "right to die," sexual promiscuity, Christian symbols on public property, prayer in schools, public officials invoking God, "separation of church and state" and the like.

But while the outward expressions of the war play out in society, the real battle is spiritual. These battles are not merely skirmishes over the preferences of individuals in society, they are rooted in spiritual realities which are literally at war with one another. As God and Satan interact with humanity, the followers of each are pursuing activities and lifestyles which reflect their masters. Since these activities and lifestyles literally contradict one another, it is inevitable that the culture wars will be expressed in society.

All people base their lives on a set of assumptions about what is real and true. This is their worldview. Christians assume that the God of the Bible is a real person and that his revelation in the Bible is an expression of his character which he wants humanity to receive and follow. Non-Christians assume that the God of the Bible is not an expression of ultimate reality or they misunderstand and misrepresent him. Either way, they end up with a set of worldview assumptions which run contrary to what the Bible teaches and express their beliefs in ways which conflict with God's revelation of himself. All of these beliefs play out in society in ways which are seen in the world's culture wars.

As Christians, it is critical that we truly buy into our Christian faith to the point that we become active in expressing it in the world. Many, if not most, Christians believe that they can simply ignore the culture war battles and not be affected by them. After all, abortion, homosexual marriage, the removal of the 10 commandments from the courthouse walls and the sexual promiscuity of others doesn't personally affect me, right?

If that is what you think, you are totally wrong!!! The overall flow of a culture directly affects you, and those you care about, by lowering the value of human life and by creating an environment where your freedoms are taken away. The desensitization of our nation to the mass murder of millions of preborn infants under the pro-abortion notion of "choice for women" has also made it legitimate to denigrate other arenas of human life – like the elderly and the handicapped. If it is okay to kill preborn babies who are inconvenient or create economic difficulty, why not already born babies, or people who have become "unproductive" due to aging, or children who "can't have good a quality of life" due to Down Syndrome or some other birth defect? If homosexual marriage is okay, why not polygamous marriage? (This is already being tested in American courts, by the way.) If the 10 commandments can be removed from the public square because it is a "religious" (faith) expression, what other expressions can be removed because some group doesn't like them? (Remember, every worldview is a faith expression, and all we have here is one faith seeking to exchange an already established one with their own.) And if a Christian understanding of sexual morality is going to be eliminated, what moral standard will take its place? Will sexual relations with children or animals become okay?

The fact is, some moral standard will dominate society. Those who point to Christianity and say we need to eliminate religion from the public square are not looking to substitute it with a non-religious expression. The acceptance of abortion, homosexual marriage, removal of the 10

commandments and sexual promiscuity is simply advocacy for a different religious (faith) expression.

The question is: Which expression is true? There is such a thing as truth – the way reality is actually structured. Either there is a God who has revealed himself to us or there is not. If the Bible truly does represent the truth, it is incumbent on Christians to stand strong in that truth. That means we must do more than merely give lip service to our belief in the Bible. It means that we must express our belief to the extent that we actively engage the culture war.

To do this rightly, though, means that we must do more than simply fight to win the day regarding various issues – like abortion or homosexual marriage. We must do that, but first and foremost we must be active in sharing the truth of the gospel with those who don't know Christ. The worldview foundation must be in place before the expressions can ever take hold.

As Christians, we must do more than merely give lip service to our belief in Christ. We must profoundly equip ourselves by understanding worldview, train ourselves in our Christian worldview and become active in fighting the culture war in society based on our solid Christian worldview foundation. We must deal in the spiritual as well as in the physical realms if we want to be successful in our calling.

59. How Worldview Affects Our Society By Freddy Davis

Worldview is an eminently personal thing. People hold their worldview at the most deeply, personal level possible. And it must be noted, individuals have worldviews, not societies.

That being said, the worldview position which is held by the majority, or at least the most dominant people, in the society, will have the most pronounced effect on how the society functions. This is what determines the way moral issues are addressed in the culture at large. Policy decisions in the political realm, the subject matter taught in the classroom, the headlines in the news media and the content allowed in our entertainment industry are all decided by the people who control those arenas. And it is all based on the worldview beliefs of the people who are allowed to control those levers.

This principle can easily be seen in the way American society has changed over the last several decades and in the culture war battles which are being fought, even today. Back when a Christian theistic worldview dominated, things such as abortion, homosexual marriage, Christian symbols in the public square, pornography, sexual images over the airwaves, and the like, were evaluated almost exclusively from a Christian worldview perspective. Not that everyone in society agreed with the Christian point of view, but the majority, along with the ones who were in positions of authority, did. And the result was political and social policy which promoted Christian morality.

All one need do is read today's headlines to see that things are dramatically different than they used to be. A different basis for evaluating morality is now in control. Virtually every political debate we see on television features someone advocating political policy which promotes abortion, homosexual marriage, socialist economics and the like. We see people like Charlie Sheen and Lady Gaga, with their total crassness, playing to sold out audiences. We see base sexuality on display on prime time television. We see news coverage overtly slanted to promote non and even anti-Christian political and social agendas. We see evolutionary theory taught in the classroom as if it were fact. And the list could go on.

So, what has changed? What has changed is the worldview foundation of the majority in society. A Naturalistic worldview is now more prominent on the nation's stage than a Christian one. And in public polling, while a majority will still answer that they are Christian, a large percentage of those who claim to be Christian hold views which are patently not Christian. It is not unusual to find people who self-identify as Christians who believe in Naturalistic evolution, who don't see anything wrong with people living together outside of wedlock, who don't see a need to participate in a church, or who believe that homosexual marriage is acceptable. Basically, other worldview beliefs have seeped into the beliefs of a large percentage of people who call themselves Christian, but who have basically become something else without even realizing it. This has happened to such a large degree that it can safely be said that America is now a post-Christian society.

Unless there is a dramatic turn around, this trend will continue. And a dramatic turnaround is basically in the hands of the Christian community. The only way a change will take place is if a massive number of people come to Christ to the extent that a new majority is forged of those who adhere to a Christian worldview. Unfortunately, there are not enough committed Christians who are willing to put themselves on the line to go out and fight the good fight.

There are two things that must happen if change is to occur. First, Christians must become fearless in sharing the gospel. A worldview change happens within individuals when they accept Christ. But as of now, there are more people coming into society, by whatever means (birth, immigration, falling into a non-Christian lifestyle, rejecting Christ), who do not hold a Christian worldview than those entering who do. We have to turn that around. Secondly, Christians must become well versed in the issues of the day and develop the ability to share why Christian values are superior to non-Christian values. We must be able to win the debate in the public square.

Christian worldview training is the key to both of these issues. We must not only know what we believe, but why we believe it. We must understand why the Christian faith represents the truth about the nature of reality and why other worldview positions do not. We must bite the bullet and apply ourselves to master the issues related to worldview by putting ourselves under a continuous personal discipleship training regimen. Then, we must stand strong in our faith as we live it out in the world. Only then is there any possibility that things will turn around.

60. Is America in a Religious Identity Crisis? By Tal Davis

In 2008 a survey was conducted by Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar of Trinity College of Hartford, Connecticut. Results of this American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS 2008) were released in 2009. The researcher's conclusions were based on random phone calls in the 48 contiguous United States where they spoke to more than 54,000 willing respondents in either English or Spanish. The primary question they asked was simple and open-ended; "What is your religion, if any?" The researchers then compared the 2008 results to earlier surveys made in 1990 and 2001.

Here are a few of the main highlights (the full Summary Report of the survey is available online at http://b27.cc.trincoll.edu/weblogs/AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf).

The number of American adults identifying themselves as Christians (by any definition) was down from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008.

- 1. Those identifying themselves as "none" (no religious preference) nearly doubled from 8.2% in 1990 to 15% in 2008.
- 2. 70% of Americans said they believed in a personal God, 12% were atheistic or agnostic, and 12% were deistic (no personal God).
 - 3. A few other significant 2008 percentage results as compared to 1990 were as follows:
 - -- 25.1 % Catholic (down from 26.2%)
 - -- 15.8% Baptist (of any kind) (down from 19.8%)
 - -- 12.9% Mainline Christian (down from 18.7%)
 - -- 14.2% Christian Generic (down from 14.8%)
 - -- 3.5% Pentecostal/Charismatic (up from 3.2%)
 - -- 1.4% Mormon/Latter Day Saints (no change)
 - --.8% Jehovah's Witnesses (no change)
 - --.6% Muslim (up from .3%)
 - -- 1.2% Religious Jewish (down from 1.8%)

These results revealed much about the current religious landscape of our nation and the changing trends over the past two decades. Unfortunately, the trends are not good with fewer people identifying themselves as Christians in any sense of the word. In 1990 about 86% of Americans called themselves Christians. In 2008 it had dropped 10 full percentage points.

Perhaps the most telling statistic was the dramatic increase in the "nones" category (and we're not talking about ladies who wear big-brimmed hats). About one-sixth of all Americans claim no religious identification at all. The number of outright atheists and agnostics is up to nearly one-eighth of the population. Altogether about one-third of Americans either don't believe in a personal God, don't know, or don't care.

The study also showed the shrinking impact of some major denominations. The percentages of those calling themselves Catholics, Baptists, mainline Christian (Protestant), or generic Christian (nondenominational) all decreased. The only Christian designation that increased was among Pentecostals/Charismatics.

Two unorthodox groups that managed to maintain their American population percentages were the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is well known in both cases, however, though not discussed in the survey, that those two cult's greatest growth in the past two decades have been outside of the United States.

Perhaps the most dramatic increase shown by the survey was among Muslims. The percentage of those claiming Islam as their faith, though still relatively small, has more than doubled in the past two decades. No doubt increased immigration from predominantly Muslim countries along with some American converts has contributed to the growth.

The percentage of those identifying themselves as religious Jewish also dropped considerably. This may mean that the decades-long trend of ethnic Jews distancing themselves from religious faith has continued in recent years. It's a bit ironic that many Jewish leaders get alarmed when young Jewish people accept Jesus as their Messiah, yet they express little or no concern about the far greater number of their people who abandon all faith.

So what's the bottom line? Just that America continues to slide into secularism and lostness. The Christian worldview has lost its grip on American society. As Evangelicals, obviously we must recover our zeal for evangelism. We also need to teach our people (especially children and youth) why Christian belief is intellectually reasonable and how adequately to engage those of other faiths (or no faith) and worldviews with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

61. The Christian Worldview and The American Dream

By Freddy Davis

There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with the American dream. It is simply the idea that all Americans can have happy and successful lives if they work hard and persevere. In fact, the Bible encourages people to take responsibility for their lives and to work hard. Unfortunately, many people (even many Christians) equate the blessings of the material world with the blessings of God. This is not necessarily true. In some cases there will be some overlap. That being said, there are wealthy and powerful people who are far from God and many in lesser circumstances who are being used mightily by God. The American Dream and the Christian worldview are not interchangeable.

The truth is, it is possible to follow the American dream based on very different motivations. One motive is to work hard in order to become successful so that one may have an easy and comfortable life. This is, perhaps, the prevailing point of view in modern society. The only problem is, that it is a totally self-centered point of view with the goal being to have an easy life for self.

A Christian worldview, on the other hand, has an entirely different focus. Rather than a focus on self, it centers on accomplishing the purpose of God.

Contrasting Motives

In order to make this a bit more concrete, let's take a look at the contrasting motivations of a worldview focused on the American dream and one focused on the purposes of God.

Giving vs. Getting

A Christian worldview is based on *agape* (selfless) love. It is always looking to put others above self. As such, it is not trying to see how much can be accumulated. Rather, it is trying to see how much can be given to accomplish the purpose of God. This does not necessarily mean we must give away all we have. The particulars must be discerned by each individual believer. God has his particular purpose for the life of each person. The focus here is the attitude, not the particular amounts which one has.

God's Will vs. Self Will

When we talk about God's will, we are looking at life purpose. The motivation for a Christian worldview looks to God's will as the reason for thinking or doing anything. It is God's will which should determine how we make and use money, what career path we pursue, and what activities we participate in. We should not be looking merely for what will "make me happy." When we filter our thoughts through "God's will," all of the things we do become ministry rather than merely a means to gain personal satisfaction.

God's Work vs. Our Work

When considering our jobs, the most natural approach to doing work is to do whatever necessary to get the job done. Interestingly this results in different outcomes from different people. For some, this means getting by with as little as possible to make life easier. For others it

may be working hard so as to move further up the ladder in order to make more money or exercise more power.

A Christian worldview approach is different, however. Here, we still want to work as diligently as we possibly can, but for an entirely different purpose. A Christian's purpose should be to do excellent work in order to glorify God, regardless of the outcome. When this results in material gain, this gain, once again, is to be used based on God's purposes, not our own.

Practical Implications

So, in practical terms, what does this mean? It means that our motives and the use of our "stuff" gets filtered through a biblical lens rather than through mere human desires. Let's look at a few examples of how this might work. Obviously these are meant only to be examples of possibilities and not a definitive word on what any particular individual ought to do.

Vacation Home

There is nothing inherently right or wrong about buying a vacation home. The rightness and wrongness is housed in the motivation for doing it. How does it please God and further his purposes? If it is just for selfish enjoyment or to show off one's wealth, it does nothing to further God's purposes. If God leads in it to accomplish some purpose of his, it could be a very good thing. Otherwise, not so good.

Vacation Travel

There are also many different reasons for vacation travel. And, once again, the purpose of God is the key to determining whether it is good or bad. There are legitimate reasons for vacation travel such as refreshment, education or even ministry. There are also self-centered reasons for doing it. The goodness of it is all in the motivation.

Civic Activity

Is it good to become involved in the community? Maybe, or maybe not. Again, it depends on the motivation. If it is merely to gain some kind of self-gratification or for self-aggrandizement, then it may be good for the community but perhaps not good for the work of the kingdom. This does not mean that every foray into the civic arena has to be a direct witnessing campaign. But God does have a purpose for us engaging the world, and a Christian worldview has this purpose of God as its primary motivation.

Time on the Computer

Is use of the computer a good or bad activity? As with the other things we have looked at, it depends. Does its use accomplish God's purpose for our lives or is it a totally self-centered activity. This is not to take away from the possibility of a purely recreational use of the technology. We actually need down time on occasion to keep our minds and bodies fresh and sharp. Again, it all comes down to our motivations. Are we doing it as a means of accomplishing the purpose of God for our lives, or is it all for self?

In the End

To summarize the whole point of this article, it needs to be clearly understood that I am not saying we should just stay poor and not strive to advance our lives in various ways. It is not

saying we should never do things for fun and enjoyment. However, we should always filter what we do through the lens of God's will and God's way.

In every part of life we should always strive to do our best, whether it is to make money or advance in our business or career. But the motivation is critical. God is not only interested in the material result, but in the motivation that gets us there. Any motivation that does not have God at the center is not capable of producing a result that is of God. Of course, he can use bad motivations to accomplish his purpose. He is God, after all. But in that case, he has to work around the deed in order to turn something bad into something good. When that happens, the blessing of God is not on the person with the bad motivation. The best he or she can hope for is the temporal material outcome.

It is apparent that Americans have become very materialistic. It is even an issue in many churches. This does not mean that materialistic Christians are not saved, but does mean that many are living lives which run contrary to the purposes of God and are not receiving the blessings that he wants to bestow.

God has his own ways and his own purpose. We walk in God's will and way to the degree we are able to line up with it. To make that a reality, it is essential to actively pursue a full understanding of the Christian worldview and diligently seek to conform our lives to the image of God.

Part 6 Worldview and Your Devotional Life

62. Worldview and Your Devotional LifeBy Freddy Davis

When throwing a punch in karate, there are several things which must come together properly in order for the punch to be effective. If your punching technique is not right you might end up breaking your own hand rather than hurting your opponent. If you are off balance, you might end up falling down yourself rather than knocking your opponent down. An effective punch depends on proper technique. There are many improper techniques you can use, and all of them will end up causing your punch to be ineffective. But if your technique is right, your punch will accomplish the purpose for which it was thrown.

You may be wondering, at this point, what a karate punch, worldview and your devotional life have in common. In fact, there is a very important principle in common that will absolutely determine the effectiveness of your personal devotional expression. Your worldview is the basis for your devotional life with God in the same way that your technique is the basis for the way you strike someone in karate.

Implications of the Worldviews

Worldview is the set of assumptions you have about the way reality is organized. What you think about God and the way you interact with him is based on that set of assumptions. If your assumptions are wrong, you will, at best, have an incomplete relationship with God. At worst, you will be separated from him completely. But if your understanding is correct, you can have an intimate and satisfying relationship with him. Let's look at the implications of each of the worldviews at it relates to interacting with God.

How Would You Interact with God If You Were a Naturalist?

To begin with, a Naturalist does not believe that the supernatural exists, and thus does not believe that God exists. The implication here is abundantly obvious. There is no devotional life because a Naturalist does not acknowledge that there is anyone to interact with.

How Would You Interact with God If You Were an Animist?

An Animist does believe in the supernatural. In fact they believe that there are many gods. Not only that, they are convinced that the god's are responsible for their well-being. As a result, Animists are very active in praying and in performing various rituals and sacrifices to make sure the gods remain appeared. But the interaction with the gods is not personal. Rather it is mechanical; do the right actions and the gods are pleased, but do the wrong ones and they become angry. Individuals are mostly concerned with making sure the gods are appeared.

How Would You Interact with God If You Were an Adherent of Far Eastern Thought?

Those who follow a belief system based on Far Eastern Thought understand reality to be completely impersonal. There is no personal God to interact with. There is only the great impersonal cosmos. Various systems may acknowledge physical manifestations of God, but the overall view is that ultimate reality is the aggregate of energy which is already totally connected and moving toward the unity of the whole. Since all of the energy is connected, that which is related to any individual is already a part of the "godhead." Since there is no personal God to pray to, they do not pray. Rather, since they are already a part of the ultimate cosmos they see themselves as a part of the divine — and people don't pray to themselves. Rather the appropriate spiritual expression is meditation in order to contemplate how to more effectively progress in life.

How Would You Interact with God If You Were a Theist?

Theists believe that there is a transcendent God who is an objective person and who created the material order (including humanity) for a reason. The typical understanding of God recognizes that he has done something to reveal his will and his ways to mankind, usually in the form of some kind of scripture or through some prophet. The typical response to all of this, by mankind, is to try and get a grasp of God's will and follow it. A part of that is to pray to God in order to acknowledge his presence and ask his favor. In most, though not all, forms of Theism, God is acknowledged as an objective person, though he is not seen to be personal in the sense that he forms an intimate and personal relationship with individual human beings.

The Christian Faith and God

Relational Revelation is a form of Theism, so there are some things that it will have in common with what has already been said above. As with all of the worldviews, though, Theism is a very broad category and cannot fully express the specific features of individual belief systems. As a result, if we are interested in how a particular faith system treats the topic of one's devotional life, we have to address that system specifically. In our case now, since we accept Relational Revelation (Biblical Christianity) as being "the Truth," we are particularly interested in knowing how that will be expressed in our own devotional life.

First let's mention the things that are common with Theism in general. As with the Theistic explanation above, those who consider themselves to follow Relational Revelation believe that there is a transcendent God who is an objective person and who created the material order (including humanity) for a reason. We recognize that he has done something to reveal his will and his ways to mankind, and that revelation comes by means of his created order, the teachings that he gave through the writers of the Bible and his Holy Spirit. As with Theism in general, we also attempt to respond to this revelation by working to get a grasp of God's will and making our best effort to follow it. A part of that is to pray to God in order to acknowledge his presence and ask his favor.

Now all of that is great as far as it goes, but there is one more thing that is essential to understand. In the case of Relational Revelation, God is understood to be personal in the sense that he created us for fellowship with himself. He has specifically revealed the way for that to happen and provided the means to accomplish it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, an intellectual understanding of that revelation is essential, but is not enough. We must also have an experiential understanding of it. In other words, we must actually establish the relationship and interact with God within it. This relationship is an actual objective reality in the same way as the relationships we have with other human beings.

For some, this may seem a little strange since other human beings have a physical body and God doesn't. But a physical body is not the necessary ingredient for a relationship. If that were the case, we could have a relationship with a dead corpse.

What we need to understand is that a relationship is a spiritual activity and occurs between the essential spirits of two individuals. As for ourselves, we are not physical beings who have a spirit. Rather, we are spiritual beings who have a body. Our essential spirit is the fundamental core of our personhood and when we relate with someone else, the essence of the relationship happens spirit to spirit, not body to body.

Perhaps you now see where this is going. The fact is, God is spirit. In fact, the reason we are spiritual beings is because God created us in his image. He put the elements of personhood in us – things such as free will, self-consciousness, creativity, analytical ability, and so on. We are persons because God is a person and created us in his image. As a result, it is possible for us to interact with God on that essential spiritual level. Certainly there are necessary differences because our human relationships operate within a material environment. But it is possible for us to actually communicate with God in an objective sense because he made us spiritual like himself.

This means that when we pray, there is an actual communication taking place where information is being exchanged between ourselves and God. Since it is not being filtered through our physical senses, we must learn how to listen to God's communication through strictly

spiritual channels. But make no mistake, an actual conversation between ourselves and God is possible, and is his desire.

One more thing we must be aware of. Since it is possible for us to receive actual spiritual communication from the spiritual realm, we can also hear from Satan and his minions. Typically we refer to this as a "temptation," but it is nothing less than a spiritual communication designed to lead us away from God. As a result, it is essential that as we learn how to communicate with God, we must also learn how to discern which communication is from him and which is from Satan. This is what scripture is for. God's written revelation includes instructions related to how we make this distinction.

Do It!

The only thing left is to take the understanding, that we are able to intentionally and objectively communicate with God, then actually begin communicating. God created us for the purpose of relationship with himself. He provided the means which allows it to happen. And he has initiated the process. What remains is for us to make the decision to interact with him and to do it. When you figure this out, your devotional life will take on a level of meaning that before you could only dream about.

63. We All Live "As If" By Freddy Davis

Several years back when I lived on the island of Okinawa, I took the opportunity to enjoy the ocean as much as I could. The waters around that small island are absolutely gorgeous. It is so clear with fantastic visibility, and is full of all kinds of colorful coral and tropical fish. I would swim down underwater and just cruise around looking at the beauty - sometimes for an hour or more at a time.

No, of course I cannot hold my breath for that long. And I do not have gills that allow me to swim underwater like a fish. But I did have some equipment that allowed me to breathe underwater. Even though I was not a fish, my scuba gear allowed me to operate for extended periods of time in an underwater environment "as if" I were one.

At this point, you may be wondering what this has to do with living life. Well, it is actually quite a good analogy of how we operate daily. Our worldview is the expression of our understanding of the nature of reality, and we live our lives in the world as if the universe functions according to the way we conceive it. There is a strange thing, though. Our belief may or may not be accurate. Every worldview literally contradicts every other worldview. And since there are numerous worldviews, that means that many people are living life based on untrue assumptions about how the universe is organized.

This may seem strange at first thought, but people are able to do this because they have established a mental reality that lets them function in the world, even with wrong beliefs. It is like having spiritual scuba equipment that compensates for the parts of our beliefs which don't match up well with the way things are actually structured.

There is something that is true concerning the way reality is structured and our lives will operate more smoothly and meaningfully if we figure it out and live by it. But it is certainly possible to construct an alternate set of beliefs and live our lives in the world, from beginning to end. "as if" that one is true.

Let's look at how this actually plays out starting with our Christian worldview. We believe that there is a single transcendent Creator God who created the material universe in a way that would support life on planet earth. He then created mankind as a special creature in his own image and capable of personally interacting with him. Each individual makes a free will decision whether or not he or she will enter into that personal relationship. Those who do will spend eternity in relationship with God. Those who don't will be eternally separated from God.

Now, let's take a quick look at Naturalism. A Naturalist believes that physical reality is all that exists. There is no God. Indeed there is no supernatural existence whatsoever. Matter is seen to be somehow eternal, and everything that exists is a function of the eternal operation of natural forces. As a result, there is no transcendent meaning in anything. Creatures who have evolved to the level of having self-consciousness (only human beings) must create their own meaning for life. At death, the life form simply ceases to exist.

Let's look at one more belief system simply to help us with some comparisons. Animism understands reality to be divided into two parts - physical and spiritual. It is believed that these two parts exist in a symbiotic relationship. When humans in the physical world do the right acts and ceremonies to take care of the gods in the spiritual world, the gods take care of their needs on earth. When people don't do the right things, the lives of the gods are disrupted and they cause bad things to happen to the humans on earth. When bad things happen, it is up to the humans to figure out what god has been offended and to make it right. When a person dies, they enter the spiritual world and become one of the gods themselves.

We could continue on and talk about the Far Eastern Worldview and about the Theistic worldview in general. But the ones we have already dealt with will allow us to make our point.

Looking at the worldviews above, it is obvious that they each contradict one another. One cannot believe that there is one God, no God and many gods all at the same time. One cannot believe that at death a person goes to either heaven or hell, ceases to exist, or enters a singular spiritual reality all at the same time. Each worldview literally excludes all others. One of the worldviews above may be the actual expression of Truth, but all of them cannot be.

Of course, we believe that the worldview that is revealed in the Bible is that truth. But right now our purpose is to make the point stated above. There are many people in the world who are living life based on an understanding of reality that is simply not true.

There are some pretty profound implications to this. Some of the implications relate to life as we live it daily on this planet. For instance, if I believe that there is no God and have to make up my own moral rules, why wouldn't I establish standards which please me no matter what harm it does to others? Or, what if I believe that the struggles I am having in my personal life are because I have offended some god? What do you think am I going to spend my time doing? There are real life implications to the beliefs we hold.

There are also some potential eternal consequences. If it is really true that there is a God who has established a specific way to know him and get to heaven, what does that mean for those who choose not to believe in God?

We could spend hours writing and talking about the specific implications of living life by the various worldviews. But here is the bottom line. Something is Truth, and when an individual is able to figure out what that is and align with it, life is able to be consistent and meaningful in a way that is not possible when trying to live by an incorrect understanding of the way reality operates.

The difficult thing about worldview is that it is a faith position. This does not mean that it is not real. It is very real. But none of them can be empirically demonstrated. There is evidence that

indicates one may be real or unreal, but there are no scientific experiments that we can do to prove one or the other. We have to evaluate which one matches up most closely with the way reality seems to operate, then take a faith step and align our lives with the beliefs that go with it.

Naturalism can't account for the existence of matter, life and consciousness. Animism can't account for purposefulness and industriousness in life. Far Eastern Thought can't account for the human need for meaning. And most forms of Theism can't account for the depth of meaning in relationships.

Every human being lives their life "as if" the worldview that they believe is true. Only most of them are not. It is only our Christian worldview that accounts for all of the elements of material reality, human existence, and spiritual reality in a way that matches up with the way humans actually experience it all.

This is not to say that all Christians get it right. There are many Christians who claim the Christian faith, yet live "as if" parts of other worldviews were right. There are Christians who commit adultery "as if" God didn't care. There are those who don't take care of their bodies "as if" the Holy Spirit did not dwell within. There are plenty who never pray and read their Bibles "as if" God were not interested in personally communicating with them. All of this in spite of the assertion that they really are Christians.

There is something that is True and we all live "as if" that is the case. Too many are living as if that "something" were not the revelation God gave in the Bible. Perhaps it is time we did some serious investigation about what the truth really is and begin living "as if" that were true.

Summary

We may think that everyone understands the world to be the way we see it. That is simply not true. In fact, every worldview has its own way of explaining reality that literally contradicts every other worldview. That being said, it is possible for everyone to live life from beginning to end "as if" they were right, even if they are wrong. But there are consequences to getting it wrong. We can avoid that if we take the time to understand.

64. How Your Worldview Affects Your Prayer Life

By Freddy Davis

Whenever we engage a particular topic, no matter what it is, its relevance to us is based on how it directly affects our day to day life. We tend not to be conversant on topics which don't affect us much, and very conversant on topics which do. As we move along in our lives, we tend not to engage ideas that seem irrelevant until, at some point, they infringe on our lives.

In our modern day, one place many are observing this phenomenon is in politics. Many people don't pay much attention to politics at all. They are too busy taking care of their own day to day activities. Others only pay attention during voting season, and then only enough to know who or what to vote for. There are others who have a keen interest in politics and recognize how it affects their lives, so they get deeply involved.

Occasionally, though, something happens in the political arena that captures the attention of the public in a way that causes those who don't usually pay much attention do so. It seems that now is one of those times. There are things going on in the political world which are reflected in dramatic legislation which affects taxes, health care, illegal immigration, financial institutions, automobile companies and much more. Seemingly, a lot of people who had not really been

paying much attention to politics are seeing it directly affect them and are taking the time and making the effort to get up to speed on political matters. They are doing it because politics is infringing on their lives in ways which is making them uncomfortable.

Your Worldview Affects Everything

The same kind of thing is happening now among Christians. Worldview is a subject which, in the past, most Christians have not paid much attention to. It is very easy for us to think of this topic in philosophical and academic terms which don't seem to have much direct effect on our lives. That is changing somewhat because other worldviews are encroaching on our lives in ways that were unknown in the past. America used to be a rather homogenous nation both culturally and religiously, but that has dramatically changed. Now, as we work, shop, go to school and engage all of the other aspects of our lives, we are just as likely to encounter someone from a dramatically different belief system as we are someone from our own.

But it is not just the element of engaging people from other worldviews which makes an understanding of worldview so important. It is also critical for us as we seek to sort out our own personal beliefs. There *is* such a thing as a Christian worldview, and Christians ought to understand it and conform their lives to it as closely as possible. One of the critical problems we face in this is, that with so many other worldview beliefs bombarding our lives, we often allow various non-Christian beliefs to intrude into our own beliefs – often without even realizing it. This problem then affects how we practice our faith in many areas.

Worldview and Prayer

One of the areas that is often negatively affected by this problem relates to our prayer life. That is because the way we pray is determined by what we believe about the nature of God and the nature of man. When non-Christian views about these topics get injected into our lives, it cannot help but negatively affect the way we pray. To get a little background as to some of the possible beliefs that can creep in, let's look at how the various worldviews consider prayer.

The Naturalistic worldview asserts that there is no such thing as an objective, transcendent God. As such, there is no one to pray to. Prayer, for a Naturalist, is a meaningless exercise.

An Animist believes in many Gods whom they must please or their lives will be negatively affected. Animists, then, pray to a lot of gods while seeking to use the right formulas and methods to keep the gods pleased.

Believers in Far Eastern Thought religions recognize a transcendent reality, but don't understand it to be personal. As such, there is no one to pray to. Meditation is seen to be important to try and connect with the "impersonal life force," but prayer is not meaningful.

For Theists, prayer is an important activity because they do believe in a transcendent God who has influence over their lives. Most Theistic belief systems, though, don't recognize God as personal in the sense of desiring a personal relationship with individual human beings. So, the interaction tends to be rather impersonal and is reflected in prayers which focus on asking for personal needs, protection, and the like.

Of course, Christianity is a Theistic belief system so there is the common belief, with other Theists, in an objective, transcendent God. But there is one important distinction. Christians believe in a personal God who has an interest in engaging a personal relationship with individuals. In fact, the Christian faith asserts that this is the very reason for mankind's existence in the first place.

That being said, non-Christian beliefs have filtered heavily into the beliefs of many Christians which cause them to pray in ways which don't reflect who God really is. This is where what you believe about God affects how you interact with him. Let's look for a moment at some of the more common understandings about God and how it affects the praying of Christians.

Spirit in the Sky

Some people don't seem to be able to see God as a real objective person that we can know and interact with as we do physical persons. Rather, they see him as some kind of nebulous or impersonal spiritual force that we can "somehow" interact with. People who see God this way may pray, but the praying will tend to be sporadic and scattered. They believe there is something out there, but the nebulous conception of that "something" makes it difficult to truly focus on interacting with God as an actual person.

Cosmic Santa Clause

Many people only pray when there is something they want. The "want" may be some tangible item like a new car, lots of money, a new job or a promotion. Or, it may be help to overcome some problem – like a personal illness, financial problems or the impending death of a loved one. The prayers of people with this understanding consists only of asking God for stuff. There is never any giving of themselves to God.

Fearsome Judge

Still others only know God as a fearsome judge who us up there waiting for us to do something wrong so he can throw down lightning bolts and punish us. Their primary concern in life is to not do anything that will make God mad. So, when they pray, they are focused on begging God to forgive and not harm them.

Loving Father Who Is King of Kings

While there are snippets of truth in the previous three understandings, none of them allow us to pray to God based on his actual existence. Sure God is a transcendent being who is beyond our complete understanding. Sure God loves us and wants to give us gifts. Sure God is the ultimate judge and punisher of sins. But none of these descriptions alone are the truth.

The truth is, God is our loving Father who is also the King of kings. He is the one who takes care of business using his transcendent power, but he has also revealed himself to us as personal. He does want to express his love to us by giving us gifts, but he is a person – not a cosmic vending machine. He does require justice to prevail, but he also provides a means for us to be forgiven for our unjust ways. When a person prays to God with a Biblical understanding, we are able have deep respect for him in his position as King of kings, but are also intimate with him as our loving Father.

Why We Can Connect with God

Putting all of this together in the correct way is very difficult for us because the fullness of understanding about God is quite beyond our natural thinking. God is, after all, a transcendent person. For that reason, he took the effort to reveal things about himself that we could not understand using natural means. That information is what we find in the Bible.

The most important truth we need to understand in order to effectively connect with God is that he is a person. Our natural tendency is to think of God in other terms. That is because we

connect personhood with mortal humanity. But that is not the case. God is a person. In fact, God is the original person. The only reason human beings are persons is because God is a person and he created us in his image. What that means is that personhood is not dependent on having a physical body. The essence of our personhood is spiritual. Even when we interact with other human beings, the communication we pass back and forth between one other is not a function of our physical self. We use our physical bodies as platforms for communicating with one another, but the communication itself operates from our inner self – the spiritual essence of who we are.

As such, we communicate with God the same way we communicate with other human beings. That is, we pass meaning from ourselves to another. With this understanding, we need to recognize that we must interact with God as a person. The only difference is, with God we are interacting with a person who has manifested himself to us without a human body. As such, we must learn how to communicate with God directly – spirit to Spirit. That being said, the essential communication is the same. [You will find a deeper treatment of this topic in the book, *Praying is not for Wimps* available at www.marketfaith.org].

Worldview and Your Prayer Life

Everyone has a way of understanding who God is. The way you attempt to interact with him has a direct correlation with your understanding of who he is and what he is like. Just because your understanding is flawed doesn't mean that you are not saved. You can have a partially wrong understanding and still be connected with God. But your interaction with him will be affected. If you believe he is a "spirit in the sky," you will not even try to be personal with him. If you believe he is a cosmic Santa Clause, all you will ever do is ask him for stuff. If you believe he is the fearsome judge, you will always be cringing in fear. But if you have a Biblical understanding of God and recognize him for who he really is, you will be able to have both a healthy respect for his power and position while interacting with him in intimate fellowship.

Your worldview determines your understanding and your actions. It is essential to continually dig into Scripture to refine your understanding of reality as revealed by God himself. And when you get it right, your prayer life will soar and your intimacy with God will take on a new dimension that you have never before experienced.

65. Worldview and the Bible By Freddy Davis

For Christians, there is sometimes a difficulty in coming to terms with the true significance of the Bible. It is, almost without exception, seen as a book to be highly respected and used as a guide for living life. But there are other books which fit into this category, as well. What is it that makes the Bible so special?

Every worldview is founded upon some authority source which is the last word regarding the beliefs of that system. Every belief system literally rises or falls on the validity of its authority. The authority source for the Christian faith is the Bible.

But even that is not a significant enough point to help us understand the true import of the Bible. In our Christian faith, God is viewed as a real person that we are able to engage in a real relationship. The Bible is a personal communication from him. It is when we recognize that point and follow it as if he were speaking personally to us, that we begin to gain an appreciation as to why the Bible is so invaluable.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a defense of the Bible. We have done that in numerous other newsletter articles. Rather, our purpose here is to build on our founding assumptions – that the Bible expresses the truth about the nature of reality and that it reveals God, his ways and his will.

As human beings, our relationship with God is a personal relationship. It is an intimate interaction between self-conscious persons. An essential element of that interaction is communication – communication which goes two ways. That is, meaning must be passed back and forth between the individual and God.

The most common way that most people conceive of this communication relates to prayer. And that certainly is a critical means of communicating with God as we express our hearts to him and hear his voice by his Spirit. But another part of the communication process happens as we receive the message of God that is recorded in the Bible.

The Bible is not merely another book. In fact, in its essence, the Bible is God's revelation of himself to mankind. In it God has revealed who he is, what he is like, his purposes and how we can know him. And this is not sterile information – it is a personal message which takes place in real time for the person who is listening. When we read the Bible, we are reading the very thoughts of God. As such, the Bible is a personal communication to us.

At this point we must be careful not to limit what it is all about. God did not reveal the information in the Bible simply for us to become more knowledgeable. It is there so that we can know him – it truly is personal. When we read it, we are able to apply it directly to our lives personally so that we may know what God wants with us.

As we consider how we may receive this message and understand it personally, there are three means by which we are able to receive this message as something personal for our lives.

Meditation

In modern society, meditation tends to be most closely associated with Far Eastern Thought belief systems. In these systems, meditation is used as a means of emptying the mind so that the experience of the impersonal life force can become more real to an individual.

Christian meditation seeks precisely the opposite. In Christian meditation, the idea is to *fill* one's mind with something – Scripture. It is the Christian's understanding that the Bible is, literally, a communication from God. Thus, if we fill our mind with a word from him, he is able to share information with us in real time which has direct and personal implications for our lives. Of course, we must be careful that as we meditate we are not misinterpreting the text of the verses we are meditating upon. But if our understanding is correct, God is able to teach us truths which have a very personal application to our lives.

Bible Reading

Bible reading is a means of absorbing large swaths of God's communication to us at single sittings. The purpose in this is to obtain a greater understanding of the larger context of Scripture. There are many cults and false religions which come up with incorrect interpretations of Scripture by "proof texting" – taking various passages of Scripture out of context – to try and support their preconceived doctrines.

Reading large passages of Scripture at single sittings helps to avoid many of these kinds of problems by providing the opportunity to keep the context intact. This process is also a valuable means of gaining understanding of the entire scope of the Bible. There are a number of

systematic Bible reading plans in existence and it is very useful to use one of these on a regular basis.

Bible Study

Bible study is the process of digging deeply into the meaning of a limited passage or topic. The Bible was written over a period of about 1500 years by about 40 different authors in different cultural contexts and languages. It is important to understand the background information correctly in order to accurately interpret what has been written. We can't read the words of a farmer in the 6th century BC as if he were a Wall Street banker in 21st century America.

There are numerous means of Bible study such as word studies, character studies, language studies, geographical studies, and others. This kind of study is very valuable in helping us to make sure that what we are interpreting as we read is consistent with what the writers intended as they wrote.

The Scope of Our Understanding

At this point it is important to reiterate the most important point of this article. Based on a Christian worldview, the Bible is not merely another book. It is, literally, a personal communication from God to humanity. God wanted to pass on information to us about himself which could not be perceived by natural human means. As human beings, we are not capable of looking beyond this physical universe to find out about God. If we are to know anything, God must somehow communicate to us from his side.

He has provided for this in various ways, not the least of which is the Bible. The Bible is the ultimate arbiter of Truth about who God is, what he is like and what he wants from us. As such, we should make every effort to not only learn the truth contained therein, but also to figure out how to listen to the voice of God as he speaks to us through this miraculous communication source.

66. Worldview and Worship

By Freddy Davis

No doubt, you are familiar with the expression, "Sold out for God." But just what exactly does that mean? Well, in a nutshell, it is simply a reference to the concept that an individual has given him or herself to God to the degree that the controlling influence for every part of life is the will of God. Whether or not we actually give ourselves to serve God to that degree, most believers would at least admit that we ought to do so.

Another concept that most Christians consider important to achieve has to do with obtaining meaning in life. Every person has an internal drive for personal meaning and looks for it in various places. As Christians, we often point to our relationship with Christ as something that provides that kind of meaning for our lives.

These two elements, deep commitment to God and personal meaning in life, both have a common core. Of course, if you don't already know what that core is, you may be scratching your head wondering why in the world these two things are being tied together here. But, in fact, both emerge out of the most central element of our Christian faith – worship.

I know that we generally tend to use the word worship when we are talking, or thinking, about the gathering of the church members together for services on Sunday or Wednesday. But the concept of worship actually goes much deeper than that. It is the very essence of our relationship with God. Worship certainly can happen when we are together with our Christian family in a mass gathering – but not necessarily. It is possible to be in a "worship service" and not actually worship. Of course, worship can also happen when we are in a small group or even alone.

In its essence, Christian worship relates to one's acknowledgment to God of his worthiness to be revered as God. It is very personal and mostly happens when we consciously stand in the presence of God and offer him praise, glory and honor.

There is no doubt in my mind that one of the greatest frustrations we experience as Christians is that we struggle to sincerely give worship to God on a consistent basis. As a result we do not live up to the standard we feel we should and don't experience the meaning in life that we feel ought to be there. I have no doubt about this because I personally know the experience. This is something that is common to virtually all believers.

But just because these failures are common experience does not mean that they are necessary. Because of our relationship with God, it is absolutely possible for us to live a consistently devoted life and to continually experience deep meaning in life. In order to get these, though, it is essential that we truly understand the scope of worship and put ourselves in a position where we actually do worship God.

The Parameters of Worship

The very basis of worship entails personal interaction with God. This, of course, occurs as we pray and as we read and study the Bible. But communication with God is not simply about moments in time when we put our focus on him. Certainly, those moments are important – even essential.

But these are only points of time in a larger context. Interaction with God relates to every part of our lives – even the times when we are not consciously focused on him. To truly grasp the significance of this, we must figure out how to make the whole process automatic (that does not mean mindless). We do that by developing a worldview foundation in which our whole life is focused on God's purpose rather than on personal desires.

This cannot be done simply by consistently praying, reading the Bible and being active in church. We must go beyond that and put ourselves in a position to continuously see the world through God's eyes. This means that we have to see ourselves as persons called by God just like pastors and missionaries. This is what happens when we have truly adopted a Christian worldview.

Basically, what God has done is to expand the concept of worship beyond what we normally think of. We certainly must worship in our personal quiet times and in our public worship services. But worship occurs at every moment we find ourselves in the presence of God. And since, for believers, God indwells our lives, there is never a time when we are not in his presence. As such, we are *always* in a position to worship. We may not always worship well, but we are continually offering something to God.

Worship with Other Believers

While many Christians have the concept that they go to church to worship, technically this is not correct. It's not that we don't worship when we go to church. But rather than going to a place in order to worship, we actually take worship with us when we go places.

In the Old Testament, God did dwell in a place. He had the tabernacle constructed as a specific place to dwell among the tribes of Israel. Later, when Israel had settled in the promised land, the temple building was constructed for that purpose.

But with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a new covenant was established. With that, God determined to no longer dwell in buildings but in the very hearts of believers. We, as believers in Jesus Christ, are literally the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So when we go to church to worship, we are not going there to meet God. We are already meeting him as we walk around on the earth. Rather, we go to meet other believers who are also carrying around the presence of God in their lives. When we do that, we worship God together with others rather than simply worshiping him alone.

When we invited Christ into our lives, we entered into a personal relationship with him. But this relationship is not simply some abstract concept – it is an actual family relationship. When we accept Christ, God literally adopts us into his family as his child. Before that moment we were merely a *creation* of God, but afterward we became his *child*.

So, when we meet with other believers we are literally meeting with our spiritual brothers and sisters. When we gather together with other Christians, we are having a family gathering. We are all gathering together in the presence of our heavenly Father to worship him together.

Understanding Our Calling

An important element in helping us to understand how our relationship with God works is to understand the concept of "calling." Who, exactly, are the people who are called into Christian ministry? In the minds of most, there is a strong distinction between those "called into ministry" and "lay people." In actual fact, the Bible uses the word calling to describe three different things.

The first calling is God's call to every human being to enter into a personal relationship with him. Before we make the personal decision to do this, we are separated from God because of our sin. When we accept this calling by inviting Christ into our lives, God forgives us and adopts us into his family.

The second calling is directed to those who positively respond to the first call, and is the call to Christian service. *Every* person who invites Christ into his or her life is called by God to perform the work of the kingdom. This work is customized to fit the individual based on the gifts and talents given by God. The goal of this calling is to build his kingdom. The work of the calling involves sharing our faith with non-believers and building up other Christians by whatever means possible based on the individual calling.

Of course, since it is a calling, each person must decide whether or not to positively respond. But the calling exists whether a Christian responds or not. So, every Christian is called into full time Christian service. God's plan is to use every believer to permeate the world with the gospel message.

The third kind of calling is the one most people think of when they hear the word "calling" – the call into vocational Christian ministry. Of those who respond to the second calling, God selects some whom he calls into leadership. These people become vocational pastors, missionaries, church staff, evangelists and so on. The primary work of this third kind of calling is not to do all of the work of God in the world. Rather, it is to enable those who have received the second calling to succeed in theirs.

This is clearly taught in Ephesians 4:11-13 where we read: *It was he (God)who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13*

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. NIV

The implication is that the calling into ministry is not something that is just given to a select few. God intends every Christian to discern the specific calling on his or her life and respond positively to it.

Living Life is an Act of Worship

As such, we need to identify just how our calling fits into daily life and what relationship it has to worship. Our calling is to build the Kingdom of God in the context of living life. We do it as we work, play, study, etc.

God's calling on our lives is always more important than whatever human activity we might do. The activity is a temporal platform. The calling has eternal significance. The goal of the Christian calling, then, is to live every part of life in relationship to God and do his bidding. As we do this, we live and work in proximity to all kinds of people with whom we are able to share Christ

Ultimately we are continuously living our lives in the presence of God, whether we are conscious of it or not. Our relationship with him is an ongoing process, not merely something we do in special moments. The activities we do are also an offering to God, not merely things to gain personal fulfillment or make money. As we engage life's activities and fulfill our calling, our ultimate purpose is to please God. And when we do that, we fulfill God's ultimate purpose which is to build his Kingdom.

When we have a Biblical understanding of life (a Biblical worldview), we are able to live constantly in the presence of God. If we find ourselves seeking temporal goals, we can be sure we are operating out of a non-Christian worldview.

It is extremely important to understand the essential purpose of God and how our calling fits into that. But there is one more concept that we must also grasp. That is, every action we take in our lives is literally an act of worship.

The word worship comes from the old English word *worshipe* and means worthiness or honor. The very idea is based on the truth that someone is of high enough worth to receive reverent love and devotion. Typically, this word is used in reference to a deity.

When thinking about how worship is practiced in daily life, people have various ideas. Worship, obviously, is practiced in the presence of God. In the minds of many, we enter the presence of God when we enter a "holy place" such as a church, or when we consciously bring God to mind on a personal level. Both of these are very legitimate worship practices. But in the Christian faith it has a broader context.

For the Christian, God is present with us whether we are consciously thinking of him or not. In fact, the Bible teaches that his dwelling place is not in buildings built by man, but in the bodies of believers. We read in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. NIV" This means that everything we do at every point in time is done in the presence of God. We are offering these acts to God whether we consider is so or not. As such, we are in constant worship.

This does not mean that we worship well. The bad or thoughtless things we do in God's presence ought to make us ashamed and embarrassed. As such we are admonished to make all of life a proper offering to God. In Colossians 3:23-24 is says, *Whatever you do, work at it with all*

your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. NIV

It should be powerful motivation for us to align our lives, thoughts and actions, with God and his purposes. If we understand this rightly, every part of life becomes a sweet offering to God and an act of worship.

67. The Ultimate Key to Revival

By Freddy Davis

True revival is something that most Christians long for, but few ever see. In fact, it may be that a large percentage don't even know exactly what it is. If you were to go around and ask a sample of Christians to give a definition of revival, most would probably stumble around trying to give a good answer. A revival is a special work of God where we see him mightily working in the world to accomplish the purpose of his kingdom. Most only think of revival as some kind of emotional experience – those special high energy feelings of closeness to God. But feelings within Christians without a visible change in the lives of non-Christians out in the world is not real revival. True revival results when people's lives are changed over the long haul and society is affected by it.

A pervasive, long-term spiritual impact by Christians on the world will not happen by attempting quick-fixes (revival meetings, social projects, etc.). It will require extensive and conscientious "grunt work" by believers in the churches of a community. It will also not be accomplished if the believers in our churches are depending on the clergy to do most of the heavy lifting. True revival only happens when the "person in the pew" is front and center.

In truth, one of the greatest problems hindering revival does relate to the conception people have of what it actually is. Wrong thinking leads to wrong actions and results. If the thinking about revival is wrong, believers will be looking to the wrong solutions to facilitate its happening. So, just where should we start in conceiving of revival?

Common (and wrong) View of Revival

Many people view revival like a balloon. A balloon just lays there until someone picks it up and blows it full of air. At that point, when the person lets the balloon go, it flies around wildly for a period of time – until it runs out of air. Then it just sits around until someone picks it up and blows it full of air again.

Many people think of the church as that balloon. They just hang around waiting for God to blow his spirit on them so they will have impetus to energetically do his work. This kind of thinking looks almost strictly to emotion to determine when to actively serve God. With this kind of thinking, Christians go out and share the good news only when they "feel" God's power and presence. When they don't "feel" him, they sit around and pray for him to make them feel it again.

The reason this is so bad is that it works contrary to God's stated desire and his revealed ways. God is present and actively working in us, and in the world, regardless of how we may feel at any given moment. We are called to serve him actively and energetically no matter how we feel.

Necessary New Paradigm for Revival

God's work in the world is more like the operation of a car. It is a God/man partnership. God is responsible for the fuel and the driving instructions. We are responsible for being obedient in driving according to his purposes.

God has revealed his will in his revelation. He has also provided his Spirit who dwells in our bodies on a continual basis. His Spirit provides us with both power and instructions on how to live. We are to "drive his car" to accomplish his purpose every day, no matter the circumstances and no matter how we feel.

How to Get on Track for Revival

One of the struggles average Christians have regarding their advancement in the faith relates to their Christian education. Of course, there are notable exceptions, but most lack an in-depth understanding of their faith and are weak in the skills which help one effectively do the work of God. Much of this has to do with a wrong understanding of the role of individual Christians. Rather than grasp their legitimate responsibility, all too many look to the clergy (the professionals) to do the work of ministry. As such, they are satisfied to hire trained professionals to work in their field while they watch them do the work.

But the Biblical model is different. The Bible teaches that the work of the professional minister is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:11-13). That means that the main ministers are the people in the pews. The Biblical mandate for the professional clergy is to equip the believers who are under their influence in ways which help them do their calling. Every believer is called into full time Christian ministry. It is just that most are to do their ministry in a secular vocation.

But for this to become a reality, the person in the pew must be equipped to do the work. For most Christians this simply isn't happening. Sunday school classes do not provide this kind of equipping.

But even if there is an equipping system in place, there must also be a methodology to promote pervasive and sustained revival within the community. There are four things that need to happen.

1. It Begins with Education.

The problem in the church related to insufficient knowledge of the Christian faith is not new to modern times. In fact, a great deal of what inspired many of the writings of the New Testament were problems related to a lack of knowledge about the Christian faith in the churches in the first century. Just look at some of the issues the apostle Paul dealt with in his epistles. There is a knowledge base that Christians must master if they intend to serve God faithfully.

Believers must have a solid theological foundation – not just an emotional one. The problem is that it is not possible for most average Christians to attend Bible school or seminary. As such, there must be some other means by which believers are able get this training. This kind of foundation can be gained in special schools and classes, but is most easily provided in the local church.

There are two categories where this education must focus and two key points within each one.

1. Acquiring a Biblical Mindset

The first category relates to our mindset. Within this category there are two key areas where this kind of education must be focused.

The first relates to the process of actually living life in relationship with God. The God of the Bible is a God of holiness. It is essential for Christians to fully understand what that means and how it is to be lived out in daily life.

The second key area relates to our concept of ministry. Ministry is not just the domain of the professional minister. Every believer is called into full time Christian ministry. It is just that most are called to do their ministry from the platform of a secular profession. This sense of calling among rank and file Christians is vital if the Christian faith is to be actively promoted in the world.

2. Christian Skills

The second category involves Christian skills. Within this category are also two skill sets which Christians must master. Most faithful Christians will acknowledge the necessity of both of these, but are woefully untrained in either.

The first skill set within this category relates to actively and continually engaging our personal relationship with God. We tend to know a certain amount about God, but we must go a step beyond that and become skilled at living daily life in his presence.

The second skill set regards sharing our faith. We live in a world which is very complex regarding the numbers and kinds of belief systems we must interact with. We must understand how to share the gospel with these various people in ways that make sense to them. This often requires a different way of witnessing than the traditional approach.

It is not required that one get special training to do either of these activities. Special training is necessary, however, if we wish to become good at them. Sustained revival will only happen when a large number of Christians are proficient in these skills and are using them continually in daily life.

2. The Effort Must Be Engaged at a Grass Roots Level.

It is not enough for pastors and other professional ministers to be educated and excited about the Christian faith. Revival is a function of the entire body of Christ. If the people in the pew are not the impetus for a revival movement, then it simply will not happen. The role of the leadership is to equip the body of Christ for ministry. There are not enough church leaders with enough personal contacts in the world for them to be effective in generating a revival movement.

3. The Effort Must Be Systematic and Long-term.

A short term emotional high is not true revival. In true revival, what we are being revived to is fellowship with God. Real fellowship is not something that happens just when we are emotionally charged. It is needs to be continuous throughout our entire lives – regardless of feelings. Thus, every generation must be trained with both the knowledge and skills of the Christian faith. A plan must be put in place, and implemented, which provides a foundation for growth and active service.

4. The Effort Must Be Planned.

Revival doesn't "just happen." It emerges when God's people get serious about their personal ongoing fellowship with him and put forth the effort to continually grow in him. This kind of

long term effort requires planning. Not that we plan God's work, but we must have an intentional plan for equipping ourselves and implementing what he has called us to.

Building Towards Revival

It is one thing for a single church to develop a revival mentality and a plan to move it forward. It is something altogether different to develop that for an entire community. There must be some kind of coordination between churches and between denominations.

I believe that God has uniquely positioned and equipped MarketFaith Ministries to serve in that capacity. Our staff has a background in pastoral leadership, in church planting, and in domestic and international missionary work. Our organizational structure is also designed to facilitate that kind of work.

Specifically, we are able to:

- 1. Develop a localized plan to facilitate a wide ranging grass roots revival effort.
- 2. Come to individual churches to explain the basics and inspire church members to get on board.
- 3. Provide the specific kinds of training needed to equip believers for their calling in Christian ministry. This can be done in individual churches and in larger settings.
- 4. Provide leadership training so church members can become trainers within their own churches.
- 5. Serve to promote a Grass Roots Revival Project to increasing numbers of churches. If this is something you believe is worth exploring, you are invited to contact MarketFaith Ministries, to discuss the possibilities. We would love to partner with you to facilitate a revival movement in your area.

Part 7 Worldview and Your Witness

68. How an Understanding of Worldview Helps Your WitnessBy Freddy Davis

In spite of what many people try to assert today concerning the founding of America, the country was specifically established based on Christian ideals and principles. The people who founded this country intentionally drew from a Christian worldview to establish its culture and institutions. That is because they were, themselves, Christians.

Throughout American history, of course, there have always been people who had other beliefs. But traditionally, these were a small minority. Today, we see an entirely different dynamic at work. In our modern times, the number of people who claim to be Christian is still a large majority, but there is now a very large and vocal minority who have been very successful in altering the Christian foundation. Of course, this is not strictly an American phenomenon. A very similar process happened in previous times in Europe, as well.

The purpose, here, in mentioning this change is not related to the political implications of that fact, though there certainly are political implications. Rather, the purpose here is to examine the implications related to how we, as individual Christians, interact with this growing group of non-Christians – particularly as it relates to sharing a witness with them.

In times past, virtually everyone in American culture (with few exceptions) at least started with a Theistic worldview – and most actually ascribed to a Judeo-Christian belief. In our present day, that is simply not the case. Naturalistic beliefs are actually dominant in our educational institutions, in the media and in the entertainment industry. There are also significant pockets of Animistic and Far Eastern Thought adherents. And with modern communication and transportation technology, these beliefs are in the public square more than ever in the history of mankind.

So, what do we, as Christians, do with Christ's admonition to go and make disciples among this increasingly diverse population? This is a real problem for many simply because there is a lack of understanding about how to deal with it and because of a fear that we will not know how to give an answer. At this point, a knowledge of worldview becomes critical for Christian witness.

And not to leave out Christians in other parts of the world where a Theistic belief system is not dominant and never has been, we see the same issues at work. Interacting with people with a non-Christian worldview requires a means by which we are able to engage in a way which makes sense to the listeners.

What is Witness?

Perhaps before we go any further, we should first define what we mean when we use the word "witness."

This word actually has two forms, and we need to understand both.

The first form is the noun. In this form, the word refers to a person who has personally experienced an event. If we know Christ, we are witnesses of what he has done in us. We have seen first-hand how he has generated change in our lives.

The second form of the word is the verb, and is the one that we are mostly concerned with here. When we give a witness, we are sharing a firsthand account of something we have seen, heard, or experienced. We are taking the noun and doing something with it. So, if we know Christ, we are called by God to share that with those who do not know him.

Based on the definition above, we see that a witness is actually nothing more than a messenger. We can share what God has done in our lives, but we are not capable of changing another person's life. God changed us, and if another person's life is to be changed God will have to do that, too.

God has, though, chosen us to partner with him in the process. When we share the gospel message with others, we bring them knowledge of what is possible so God can work. And that is what witnessing is all about.

Training to be a Witness

The teaching methodology for most witness training programs is a one-shot process. I have had the opportunity to participate in numerous witness training opportunities in my life and all of them, without exception, gave the training using a "cold call" mindset. We are taught to go to a person's home, or some place, and begin a conversation which leads to a decision to receive or reject Christ. Many times the people being witnessed to are total strangers. Even if they are

known, there is more often than not, no personal relationship to serve as a bridge for a natural conversation.

This is not meant to denigrate street evangelism or other cold call witnessing experiences. These kinds of witness opportunities do have their place. But that approach should be the exception rather than the rule for most Christians. The number of Christians spiritually gifted in the area of cold call evangelism is small. To force the majority of believers to use that method is to push them away from sharing their faith.

With a cold call approach, the end of the presentation is typically the end of any further opportunity. When witness is viewed as an event, a person either makes a decision for or against Christ at the conclusion. Whichever way it goes, there is typically no relationship in place capable of taking the person further.

So, How Should We Think About Witness?

Occasionally, our witness opportunity will be an event, but for the most part it needs to be conceived of as a process – a regular expression of life. As we engage relationships, some of the people we interact with will not be Christians. We must learn to cultivate those relationships and become able to share in the normal flow of life. To truly grasp this principle, we need to understand how this all really works.

God's Part of the Process

Salvation is a literal, objective change that takes place in a person's life. When someone invites Christ into his or her life, God makes a legal pronouncement that the person is no longer guilty of sin and he performs a miracle to give that individual a new nature. Only God can do these things. There is nothing the human witness can do to generate those effects in a person's life.

The Recipient's Part of the Process

By the same token, the witness cannot do anything to make another individual open his life and invite Christ in. God made us to be free-willed individuals and he will not violate our personal will when it comes to a relationship with himself. Every individual must personally decide to open his life to Christ if it is going to happen.

Our Part of the Process

So, as a witness, we are not capable of doing God's part or another individual's part of the witnessing process. But God has reserved a place for us, and that place is to share the message of salvation. Receiving salvation is dependent on first coming to an understanding that we are sinful beings and because of that are separated from God. Based on that, they must realize that they must make a decision to personally receive that salvation. This understanding must come from somewhere. Certainly it can come by reading the Bible or watching an evangelistic TV program. But most often, and most effectively, it comes from the mouth of someone who already knows a relationship with Christ. So it is our role, as believers, to act as a witness and share that message.

Worldview and Witness

In a situation where the person we want to share a witness with already has a Theistic worldview, it is not so difficult to just dive into an explanation of the gospel message. The

person at least already believes that there is a God who created the universe and mankind. We only have to share with them who this God is and how they can connect with him.

But what happens when those you wish to witness to have an entirely different understanding of the nature of reality? It would not be productive to begin telling them how to know God because their understanding of him is not consistent with what you are trying to share. If they believe there is no supernatural reality, telling them how to know God would be nonsense. If they believe there are many gods, they will be confused about which God you are referring to. If they believe in an impersonal life force, a personal God will not make any sense to them.

As such, the first thing a witness for the Gospel must discern is the other person's understanding of reality. Then, based on that understanding, it is necessary to start the witness by explaining who God is based on what they do not yet understand about the God of the Bible. Until a person understands which God you are talking about and the nature of that God, no further explanation will make any sense to them.

And this is where an understanding of worldview comes into play. By understanding worldview we can grasp all of the possibilities which exist regarding people's understanding of reality. As we interact with them, it becomes easy to detect what gaps they have in their understanding about God and reality, and to share information which bridges the gaps. Without this understanding, it can be very difficult to discern what kind of knowledge the other person needs in order to fully comprehend your witness.

To truly grasp the nature of witness in our modern pluralistic world, it is necessary to move beyond a simple knowledge of how to share the gospel message. Certainly we cannot avoid learning that knowledge. When the time comes to lead a person to a decision to receive Christ, that basic knowledge is critical. But to get to that place may require laying a foundation which can only be set based on a knowledge of worldview.

What is being recommended here is not the simple approach that witness training typically offers. It definitely goes a step deeper. But it is also not an impossible task. As Christians we are charged by God to partner with him to share the gospel. It is now up to us to step up to the plate and do our due diligence to become the witnesses we are called to be.

69. Worldview and Witness in Our Politically Correct World By Freddy Davis

Ann Coulter is a conservative American political columnist and author. She makes her living doing speeches and writing books presenting her conservative political philosophy – and she is very successful at it. Overall, I, personally agree with a lot of what she says. However, she is one of those people who expresses her opinion in very controversial ways in order to get a lot of attention. She is also very good at that. And while I do agree with a lot of her opinions, I am not particularly fond of her style.

Ann has a new book which was just released and, as with many authors, wants to get as much publicity as possible. Since she is already well known, she is able to get interviews on many of the national news and political TV and radio shows. Recently, she was on the CNBC show, The Big Idea, hosted by Donny Deutsch. On this show an exchange took place between Ann and Donny which was very revealing. I will not put the entire article here, but will put in the first part of a Fox News report on the exchange.

Slash-and-burn columnist Ann Coulter shocked a cable TV talk-show audience Monday when she declared that Jews need to be "perfected" by becoming Christians, and that America would be better off if everyone were Christian.

Coulter made the remarkable statements during an often heated appearance to promote her new book on advertising guru Donny Deutsch's CNBC show "The Big Idea."

In response to a question from Deutsch asking Coulter if "it would be better if we were all Christian," the controversial columnist responded: "Yes."

"We should all be Christian?" Deutsch repeated.

"Yes," Coulter responded, asking Deutsch, who is Jewish, if he would like to "come to church with me."

Deutsch, pressing Coulter further, asked, "We should just throw Judaism away and we should all be Christians?" She responded: "Yeah."

Coulter deflected Deutsch's assertion that her comments were anti-Semitic, matter-of-factly telling the show's obviously upset host, "That is what Christians consider themselves: perfected Jews."

I'm not sure Ann expressed her theology the best it could have been done, but I do deeply appreciate the fact that she is a Christian and that she is unapologetic about that. She actually put forth a pretty decent witness for the faith. What is incredible to me, though, is the response of the show host. And this response gives us a tremendous glimpse into the mindset of the politically correct point of view of modern American society.

The point in the article that really jumps out at me is Donny Deutsch's incredulous response that Ann Coulter would dare believe that all people should become Christians. Since Deutsch has no thought of trying to persuade Ann to become a Jew, we can deduce that encouraging people to convert from one belief to another is not an important matter for him. This would be a classic postmodern response because of the belief that there is no such thing as a belief system which is objectively true. Postmodernism asserts that any belief is okay if it suits the individual. It is possible for one thing to be true for one person and something else entirely different to be true for another. So, when Coulter maintains that all people should turn to Jesus Christ, it is a huge shock to Deutsch.

Think about it. What does this say to Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God? What does this say about the Biblical teaching that God is an actual person who set up a particular way for mankind to receive salvation? What does this say about what is necessary for us, as Christians, who have been commissioned by God to share a witness, if we wish to share our faith with people who have this postmodernist mindset?

We live in a world where political correctness is not only annoying, it is in violent opposition to our Christian faith and witness. And there is another dirty little secret that is often overlooked. There are many Christians who have bought into this way of thinking. Yes, there are many

people who claim to be Christians who believe that it is alright for other people to hold other beliefs as long as they are sincere.

From a worldview perspective, we know this is wrong. Even more than that, it is impossible. It is impossible for two contradictory beliefs to be right at the same time. They can both be wrong, but they can't both be right. In this case, it is impossible for Jesus to be the only way to God and for every sincerely held belief to be valid, both at the same time. At least one of them is wrong.

We will not be able to do an in depth analysis in this article related to postmodern beliefs. But can make a couple of summary statements. Objective evidence for the truth of the postmodern point of view is non-existent. Postmodernism rests entirely on the opinion of the individuals who hold it. It is basically the belief that, "It is true because I believe it is true." There is no other authority that can be put forward to support it.

On the other hand, the evidence for the truth of the Christian faith is profound. Without going into great detail, there is evidence such as: our life experience matches up with the teachings of the faith, the human person matches up with what is asserted in the Bible, the evidence for the accuracy of the Bible is strong, there is strong evidence that Christ was who he said he was, there is strong evidence of the truth of the Biblical text in extra-Biblical writings, there is strong archeological evidence for the accuracy of the Bible, there is strong evidence that Jesus was actually resurrected from the dead, and the list goes on.

If we are interested in being faithful to the commission our Lord gave us to spread the gospel to every person, we are going to have to be willing to stand up to the politically correct assaults on our faith. But we can't do it by simply asserting that our position is right with nothing to back it up, as the postmodernists do. We have to go one step further by learning to give a reason for the hope that is within us. We have to be able to express *why* we are right and they are wrong. This is the genius of understanding worldview.

We really do live in a politically correct world which sees our Christian faith as politically incorrect. If we understand the issues of faith in the context of worldview, we have put ourselves in a position to share a credible witness with those who would try to squelch us. Donny Deutsch and his ilk are dead wrong. There is something that is objective truth – God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. We can be confident in that and boldly stand up for our faith, if we make the effort to learn our foundation.

70. How to Never Be on the Defensive Regarding Your Faith in Christ By Freddy Davis

The most effective way to quiet an opponent is to put them on the defensive. As Christians, for the most part, our tendency is not to go on the attack in that way. We have this desire to bring peace to the highest extent possible. On the other hand, people who oppose Christianity often make it a practice to bring up anything they can to try and put us on the defensive.

As we consider how to deal with this kind of situation, we need to get over our reluctance to go on offense. This is not to advocate that we attack for the sake of attacking. In our Christian faith, the ends do not justify the means. It is not okay for us to have an ugly attitude as we defend our position. But it is certainly possible for us to be confident that our Christian faith is the truth, and to lovingly express that in a way which keeps us from finding ourselves on the defensive.

Getting at the "Truth" Issue

The bottom line of not having to be defensive is to know why our faith is the truth and why other belief systems are not. The key to this emerges out of an understanding of worldview.

This article will not go into depth about the details of the process of doing that. Today we are going to go in a slightly different direction and simply look at bottom lines. Since the four foundational worldviews differ at such a fundamental level, it is possible for the actual truth about the structure of reality to be embedded in only one of them. Using a simple analytical method, we are able to quickly and easily figure out which three of the four we can completely eliminate. We will be able to do the same kind of analysis on the fourth one as well. But there are some additional nuances there which require us dig a little deeper to help us discover why one particular faith (our Christian faith) is true and all of the other beliefs within the correct worldview are not.

To give an initial summary, the three worldviews which do not contain the truth are Naturalism, Animism and Far Eastern Thought. Theism is the worldview approach which contains the actual truth. But even within Theism there are many different belief systems, and only one of them can be true. As we examine the possibilities we will see why our Christian faith is the most reasonable alternative. If we can reach a place where we are confident about this, we need never be on the defensive again.

How to Analyze Belief Systems

As we explore the evidence for truth, there is a short process we must go through. The following four steps can be used to evaluate any belief system at any level. It can be used to appraise an entire worldview system or a specific religion or philosophy. The four steps are:

- 1. Determine which of the four worldviews categories the belief system falls into. This will help us later in our evaluation.
- 2. Determine the authority which the belief uses to support its conclusions. Every belief system has something that it relies on to assert itself as the truth.
- 3. Determine what evidence exists for the reliability of the authority. There has to be some kind of evidence, and it is either reliable or not. Something is used to support a system's authority, and we need to know what that is.
 - 4. Finally, we must take the evidence and evaluate it.

Using these four steps, we can begin to determine the validity of the various belief systems. Let's start with the three foundational worldviews which do not, in any configuration, represent the truth.

Why Naturalism is not the Truth

The foundational authority for Naturalism is human rationality. It is assumed that everything which exists is the result of natural causes, and we can understand it by human reason. The only problem with this approach is that there is no basis for making that assumption. It dismisses, out of hand, any possibility of a supernatural reality, but does so based only on the faith assertion that there is no supernatural reality. There is, simply, no evidence for this assertion.

On top of that, it is unable to use natural evidence to come to its conclusion – which it must if it is going to claim that the natural is all that exists. It cannot account for the origin of the material which makes up the natural universe, the origin of life, the origin of the many species of

life forms, or the origin of human self-consciousness. It is entirely a faith position, and adherents can do no more than assert that "this is true because I believe it is true."

Naturalism simply has no basis for answering those who rationally assert another position. They cannot answer why their rationally derived position is right and other rationally derived positions are wrong. Adherents do try to bring scientific rationale and evidence to the table, but unless they are able to use natural means to answer the questions above on origins, the evidence has no basis for acceptance.

Why Animism is not the Truth

Animism believes that there are spiritual and physical elements of reality and that they operate in a symbiotic relationship. The actions that physical beings take in the physical part affect the spiritual beings in the spiritual part, and vice versa.

This worldview position is typically asserted on the basis of tradition. Over the centuries, the beliefs and traditions have been passed on, mostly orally, from generation to generation. The problem is, all of the evidence for this point of view is anecdotal and is totally dependent on people believing the Animistic worldview. There is no external evidence that can be brought to bear to back it up. People believe it because that is what they have been taught growing up, not because of any kind of external evidence. There is no basis for answering those who grew up with another set of traditions as to why their traditions are right and other traditions are wrong.

Why Far Eastern Thought is not the Truth

Far Eastern Thought asserts that reality is composed of an ultimate impersonal life force which exists outside of the material universe. There are, though, elements of that life force which are separated from the main body and are manifested in physical reality. All of these separated pieces are continually reincarnating to higher and higher levels within the material universe on their drive to move closer to the main body, and ultimately reconnect with it.

This worldview is primarily founded on human experience. Once again, there is no external proof to back up the assertions. There are numerous holy books and individuals who have claimed to have special knowledge of all of this, but it is all based on their own personal experience of life using Far Eastern Thought worldview assumptions. There is no external evidence that any of it is true.

As with Animism, all of the evidence which tries to back this up is anecdotal, and requires that an individual already accept the foundational assumptions of the worldview. There is no basis for answering those who grew up with a different set of experiences as to why their experiences are right and other experiences are wrong.

Why All Theistic Belief Systems Outside of Christianity Are Not the Truth

All Theistic belief systems believe in a God who is transcendent and who is responsible for the existence of the material universe. To be sure, the ultimate truth about reality is contained within a Theistic system. But in order to get at the ultimate truth, we have to work a little harder. There are, in fact, many Theistic belief systems, all which have their own unique understanding of ultimate reality, man and salvation. All of them cannot be right. In fact, reality only exists as it exists, and everything else is not right. This is the only possibility since every belief literally excludes every other belief concerning the essential matters of faith.

To properly address this, we really need to deal with each belief system individually. Obviously, in a short article like this, that is not possible. We can, though, lay out some

principles which can be used to eliminate all of the systems which do not represent ultimate truth. If you apply these principles to understanding a non-Christian Theistic belief system, you will quickly discern why it is not the truth. We will lay this out as a series of questions.

- 1. Do the teachings of the belief which relate to the nature and experience of humanity, match up with how human beings actually experience life?
 - 2. What positive evidence exists that a particular approach to understanding reality is right?
 - 3.Is there valid evidence for the historical accuracy of a system's authority source?
 - 4.Is the authority source logically and historically consistent within itself?
- 5. Is there any kind of external corroboration that a particular approach to understanding reality is right (scientific, historical, archeological, etc.)?
 - 6. Are the founders and developers of the belief system trustworthy?

The fact is, all non-Christian, Theistic faith systems crumble at one or more of these questions.

Why Hybrid Belief Systems Are Not the Truth

There are a number of belief systems which we call hybrids. These are beliefs which try to take elements from two or more worldviews and combine them – usually in an attempt to try and not exclude anyone. There are two profound problems with this.

First of all, every worldview literally contradicts every other worldview. If two elements from contradictory worldviews are put into one system, you automatically have an internal contradiction. For example, God can't be both personal and impersonal at the same time. Man can't be a sinner and not a sinner at the same time.

The first problem is enough, on its own, to disqualify a hybrid from being the truth. But there is a second problem that also emerges. Each hybrid has its own history and authority which can be evaluated. In doing this, none of them are able to pass the "validity" test.

Why Our Christian Faith Is the Truth

While there is no objective scientific test which can validate the truth of any belief system, including our own, there is tremendous evidence which can be brought to the table to give us confidence that our Christian faith is the truth. Entire books, literally, have been written on this topic, so we are not able, here, to give a detailed account. We can, though, give some short answers to the six questions above which will serve as a foundation for our confidence.

1. Do the teachings of the belief which concern the nature and experience of humanity, match up with how human beings actually experience life?

In fact, they match up perfectly! The Bible teaches that humans are personal, self-aware beings, that we are capable of knowledge, that we have a sense of morality, that we experience the world as an objective reality, and that we have a transcendent spiritual sense. We can't deal with all of the evidence here, but these issues, along with many others, match up perfectly with the way we, as human beings, actually experience life.

- 2. What positive evidence exists that the Christian approach to understanding reality is right? There are many streams of evidence which point us to the truth of the Christian faith. There are such things as:
 - -- The Biblical teachings about man match up with actual human experience.
 - -- The textual and historical evidence for the accuracy of the Bible is very strong.
 - -- The evidence that Christ was who the Bible says he was it strong.

- -- There is strong archeological evidence for the Bible's accuracy.
- -- The life of Christ stands the test of character.
- -- The life of Christ matches up with the identity of the Messiah from prophesy.
- -- There are literally scores of fulfilled prophesy in the Bible.
- -- This list could go on, but this is sufficient to make our point here.
- 3. Is there valid evidence for the historical accuracy of its authority source (the Bible)? The historical accuracy of the Bible is backed up by archeological research and by the sheer volume of manuscripts available from very early sources.
- 4. Is the authority source (the Bible) logically and historically consistent within itself? The Bible is completely consistent within itself, in spite of the fact that it was written over a period of more than 1500 years by dozens of authors. While there are still matters which have not been verified by archeological finds, incredibly, every archeological find which has ever been discovered, relating to matters in the Bible, has backed up its accuracy.
- 5. Is there any kind of external corroboration that the Christian approach to understanding reality is right (scientific, historical, archeological, etc.)?

There is strong scientific, historical and archeological evidence for the truth of the Bible's information which is found outside of the Biblical text itself.

6. Are the founders and developers of this belief system trustworthy?

There has never been any legitimate finding to discredit the validity of any of the founding fathers of the Christian faith. This does not imply that these were perfect people, but that what they received from God, and passed on, was the truth. Additionally, the character of Christ, along with the evidence of his death and resurrection, are profound evidence of his trustworthiness.

Please understand that the answers given here are very incomplete because of space constraints. It is our intention only to give you places to begin your own personal research. There are literally massive amounts of material that can be brought to bear on each of these questions.

How to Deal with Those Who Try to Put You Down

Almost without exception, those who would try to challenge your faith will begin by telling you all of the reasons Christianity is wrong. Don't let the discussion remain there. You certainly need to be able to give a defense of the hope that is within you, but that is not the key to keeping people from putting down your faith. You, certainly, need the positive information about how to share the gospel with those who are willing to listen. But when you deal with the those who are challenging your faith, it will be necessary to turn it around and make them defend what they believe. As we have seen above, they will not be able to do it.

But you also need to realize that most people who attack the Christian faith will not understand the true nature of their opposition until you force them to see it. Most people who tend to be against the Christian faith are looking for reasons why they don't have to acknowledge God, and are not nearly as concerned with the inconsistencies of their own beliefs.

Use the following approach to turn a conversation to your advantage.

Challenger: Your Christian faith is wrong because ... (science disproves it or there is no such thing as truth, or I believe in reincarnation, or whatever).

Christian: I don't believe that you are correct, but just for arguments sake, let's say you are right. Since you don't believe my faith is the truth, tell me positively what you believe is the truth.

Once they do that, you are in a position to show them that what they believe is a faith position and that they have no standing to attack you and your beliefs. Using this approach you will immediately put them on the defensive about their faith. It will become evident that it is wrong for them to be attacking you for your faith when they, themselves, are attacking from a position that can't be defended.

Of course, the ultimate reason for doing this is not simply to attack and beat another person. There are, certainly, those situations where that is all you will be able to do. The ultimate goal, though, is to share Christ with them. If you can create an opening where they are willing to consider that they may not be right, it may then become possible for you to share the truth of Christ with them.

71. What Is the Best Starting Point for Witness?

By Freddy Davis

I became a Christian when I was sixteen years old and almost immediately felt the desire to share my faith with people who did not know Christ. That was right in the middle of the Jesus movement of the 1960s.

In order to be able to share my faith, I learned how to present the gospel message. There are actually a number of methods that people use to do this, and I learned a couple of different ones. To further expand my knowledge, over the years I have had the opportunity to participate in numerous witness training opportunities. All of these use the same gospel message (after all there is only one message), but each one is packaged a little differently.

Basically, each method consists of several parts. They usually start out with some kind of introduction – a way to engage a person in a conversation about the gospel. Following that there is an explanation of the gospel message. Then, finally, a call to make a decision.

In America, the traditional starting point for sharing the gospel assumes that the person being approached already has a basic understanding of the Christian worldview. It assumes that the person already believes in a creator God who is the one described in the Bible. In days past that was probably not an unfounded assumption. Almost everyone did believe in God that way. But that is just not the case anymore. Now you are just as likely to interact with someone who is a Naturalist, an Animist, an adherent of one of the Far Eastern Thought religions, or a member of some other Theistic religion or cult.

It used to be that we could start out telling a person: God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. But in our current day, the person may believe in a different god, may not believe in God at all, may believe in many gods, or may even believe in the "impersonal cosmos." So, what do you do if you try to present the gospel and the person doesn't believe in God or doesn't understand what you are talking about? Do you just write them off? Of course not! We can't do

that. We need to know how to explain to them the message of salvation in terms that make sense to them.

The key to dealing with this problem is not so daunting that we can't do it. We must simply realize that the gospel message never changes, but the way we tell it has to be customized to the person we are sharing with. To do this, we don't change the content of the message, but we do have to begin at the right starting point. If they don't understand who God is, we can't start simply by saying, "God loves you." We have to go one step further back and explain who God is.

So, where do we need to start in order to share an effective witness? We need to start in the place that will allow the one we are sharing with to understand. What good does it do to tell a person that God loves them if their understanding of God is different than what is taught in the Bible. We must first find out what they believe. Then we will be in a position to explain the message in terms that will make sense to them.

Doing this is possible under virtually any circumstances, but is much more difficult in cold call situations where you don't have the ability to spend time getting to know the person. Using a cold call methodology is not impossible, but it puts a great burden on the one who is trying to share a witness to have a tremendous grasp of worldview principles. But if you have the opportunity to share your witness in the context of a longer term relationship, your chance of sharing effectively, and seeing fruit, are much higher.

In a short article like this, it is impossible to give an in depth training. However, we can lay down an outline that will help us understand the process we need to use. Here, we will put this in a five step formula for sharing a witness.

1. Listen, first, to discern what the other person believes.

You can't know where to start a witness until you find out the person's understanding of God. The easiest way to do this is to discern their foundational worldview. You can do this by finding their answers to the seven worldview questions. All you need to do is ask them questions about what they believe and just listen to them talk. (Since this article is not about the worldview questions, we will not take the time to deal with that here. However, you may check out the worldview primer, as well as other related articles, at www.marketfaith.org to get a grasp of this concept.)

2. Analyze the differences between their belief in God and what is revealed in Scripture.

It is not enough for you to hear what they have to say, you must also discern where they are wrong. The purpose of figuring this out is not to jump on their case. If you do that, you will certainly lose your opportunity to share what you believe. The reason this is necessary is that this will tell you specifically what you need to share. You must have this understanding firmly in mind before you ever say anything. If you are versed in an understanding of worldview, you will have a powerful tool for gathering this information. Not only will you know what the differences are between their belief and yours, you will also know why you are right and why they are wrong.

3. Step three is to let the other person know that you believe something different than they do.

There are a couple of ways to do this, and you need to pick the one which gives you the best chance of sharing your witness.

If the person is very firm in their own beliefs, the best way to approach them is to ask questions which help them to see the deficiencies in their faith. This approach lets them see that

you are genuinely interested in them and lets them share their strongly held beliefs. It also earns you your turn later on. If you were so kind as to listen to them, they will feel obligated later to listen to you. (Note: The MarketFaith Ministries website also has articles on the topics which will expose the deficiencies in the various worldviews.)

If the person is not that well versed in their own beliefs, you may be able to be a bit more direct – not aggressive and haughty, just more direct. That is because this person is not as deeply invested in his faith. The more direct approach simply means that you identify for them the areas where you see problems in their faith, and begin to give reasons why what they believe is a problem. If you do this kindly, it will open up the opportunity for you to share your solution – the gospel.

4. Get permission to share what you believe.

Getting this permission may require an overt request or may simply mean discerning that the person you are talking to is ready to hear what you have to say.

Sometimes, the person you are witnessing to is so focused on themselves that they do not really think of hearing what you have to say. In that case you may have to say something like, "I have a different understanding of God. May I share with you what I believe?" If you must take this approach, be sure that you have listened fully to them, first. After you have listened to them, they would have to be rude to turn down your request.

At other times, though, the conversation may create a natural opening for you to simply share what you believe. If that opportunity opens up, don't hesitate to jump right in.

5. Share your faith and provide for a decision.

Finally, you are in a position to share the gospel message. When you do, start at the place which helps them understand the message. If they don't believe in God, you must start by giving evidence that there is a God. If they believe in many gods, you must give reasons why there are not. If they believe in an impersonal "cosmos," you must be able to share why there is a personal God. If they believe in the God of some other religion, you must be prepared to share why the God of the Bible is the true God. If they believe in a hybrid system (a mixture of several worldviews) you need to be prepared to share why that is impossible. If they believe in God, but not the God of the Bible, you must bring them to the point of at least understanding what the Bible teaches before your gospel presentation will make any sense to them. (If all of this seems a bit daunting, let me refer you once again to the worldview primer. Once you know the basics, it is not daunting at all.)

When you get to the point of asking for a decision, you must again be very careful to discern what your friend understands. If you get a person to "pray the prayer" of repentance, but they really don't understand what they are doing, they have not really accepted Christ. Entering into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ does not happen by reciting a formula (even if it is in the form of a prayer), any more than you enter into a human relationship using a formula. We are dealing with the formation of a personal relationship, and that only happens when a person truly understands that God is a real person who can be known in a personal relationship, and they actually step into the relationship. Sometimes it is more prudent to let your witness percolate in the person's heart for a while until they truly understand. You will have to be very discerning at this point.

So, What Is the Best Starting Point for Witness?

What is the best starting point for sharing a witness? It is the place where the other person is. Wherever they are, that is the starting point. In order to be truly effective, you have to learn how to find out where that point is for each individual, and share your witness based on that understanding. If you learn how to do this, your effectiveness in bringing people to Christ will explode.

72. How to Deal with an Attack Like a Christian By Freddy Davis

The state of Florida has just adopted new science standards for their textbooks. Leading up to the adoption of the new standards, there was considerable debate about one particular element — the part having to do with the teaching of evolution.

The pro-evolution people wanted it to be stated that evolution was the entire basis of biological science, and didn't even want the word "theory" included. Those on the other side, who believe in God, were not trying to eliminate the teaching of evolution in the classroom, but did want to make sure that it was acknowledged as a theory and that the problems with the theory could also be discussed.

The day that the standards were voted on, an article appeared in my local newspaper giving the results of the vote. On the online edition of the paper, it is possible to write comments about an article. Most articles really don't get much comment, but when a controversial topic is written about, it can really get going. This was one of those articles which had comments out the wazoo.

Since I had a particular interest in this topic, I began reading the various comments. What I read was actually quite predictable. There were those who were pro-evolution who were asserting their point and insulting the Christian viewpoint. And on the other side were those who were anti-evolution and were asserting the truth that God created the world.

Now I think that a discussion like this is a good thing. To me, it is an opportunity to share a witness – and I took that opportunity to express some of the serious drawbacks of the Naturalistic point of view. But I did it in a way that was respectful and, hopefully, convincing.

Unfortunately, that was not the case for many of the Christians who commented. Some of them were down right insulting. That disturbed me because I believe an attitude like that really hurts the Christian witness. Others made comments that were just plain ignorant. They made rash belief statements without being able to back them up in any way. Now, I appreciate the fact that these folks had faith in God, but insulting and ignorant statements are not going to have any credibility with people who are of the other persuasion.

As Christians, if we want to be good witnesses in situations like this, there are two things we are going to have to take care of. First of all, we have to have the right attitude. We have to show respect to other people – not agree with their viewpoint, just respect them as persons. Secondly, we have to know our stuff. Let's look at this a bit and see if we can come to an understanding of how we can make these things a reality in our lives.

The Right Attitude

Jesus was very clear in teaching that the ends do not justify the means. He clearly taught that we are to be kind, considerate, humble and meek. He did not even approve of Peter trying to

protect him by using the sword when the mob came to take him away. We must understand that God is holy and that serving him requires holiness on our part – even if that brings some kind of personal disadvantage. As an example, it is not okay to kill abortion doctors, even though they are responsible for the deaths of many babies. We must oppose them in other ways. Jesus clearly said, "The meek shall inherit the earth." Jesus meant that as we share a gospel which opponents find offensive, we must, ourselves, be willing to endure injury with patience and without resentment. It involves both humility and constraint.

Know Your Stuff

But we also need to understand that meekness does not mean weakness. We are not called upon to simply allow our faith to be walked on. Jesus wasn't that way. He often stood up to the Pharisees and other religious leaders. He once even went so far as to violently drive merchants out of the temple.

So, how do we reconcile this? How do we stand strong in our faith while, at the same time, doing it in the proper way? Well, once our attitude is aligned with the attitude of God, we have to make sure that we have the knowledge to make our argument in a convincing way.

It is extremely important to know the truth. But that by itself is often not enough – especially when we have to confront people opposed to the truth. We must also know, and be able to explain, *why* it is the truth. Just hurling insults at people because they don't believe in God, or because they believe in evolution, is not going to win any arguments, even if our beliefs are right. It is a poor witness and poor technique. And it is particularly ineffective when the other person believes they have solid evidence as to why their position is correct. We have to be able to show *why* there is a God and *why* evolution is not the truth. This does not guarantee the other person will be convinced, but there is certainly a much greater possibility.

There are a lot of people who love their Christian faith and are firmly committed to it. When untruths are put out in the public square, like an assertion that evolution is the truth, there is nothing wrong with opposing it. In fact, that is a tremendous thing. But it is not okay to be ignorant of the *whys* of our faith. The unfortunate fact is that too many Christians are content to know *what* they believe, but not *why* they believe it.

So, just what is necessary to get the *whys*? Simply put, study and effort. The knowledge one needs to acquire in order to give an intelligent reply to opponents is readily available. You can get some training from your church or pastor, and there are all kinds of books and other resources available. In fact, that is the entire reason MarketFaith Ministries exists and why we have so many free resources on the website. It is also why I do this newsletter.

If we have the right attitude and the right knowledge, we can turn any attack around and use it to give a witness. We actually do have an intelligent leg to stand on. We literally do have the truth. And if we know how to express it, we wield a pretty powerful weapon.

73. Why People Leave the Faith

By Freddy Davis

Recently, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey about the religious affiliation of the American public. This survey indicated that there is a huge shift taking place in the religious affiliation of Americans. They found that more than one-quarter of American adults have left the faith of their childhood for another religion or no religion at all. And that is only for

people completely changing religions. If you count those who have moved from one Protestant denomination to another, that figure rises to forty-four percent.

In trying to analyze the reasons for this shift, the Pew Forum drew several conclusions. Their belief is that there are actually several reasons for this massive shift. They attributed part of it to American society's "competitive religious marketplace. "Another factor is a "dropping confidence in organized religion."

I am certain that these conclusions have an element of truth to them. But they do not tell the whole story. There is another factor which is absolutely critical to understand if we want to get at this issue in a way that allows us to actually do something to turn the tide.

We human beings have a deep seated need to connect with God. It is a part of our very being. God created us as spiritual beings with this element built into us.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of people don't know how to effectively do that – even many who are affiliated with a church. In America, other worldview beliefs have become such a part of the fabric of society that we don't even tend to think in terms of a real Christian worldview anymore. Even the conclusions of the Pew Forum are based on Naturalistic methodologies rather than Christian ones. They have looked to the "sociological reasons" rather than "spiritual reasons" for the changes. They see it as what is going on in society rather than what is going on it the heart of the individual.

What is even more tragic is that the average church is not effective in stemming this tide. The evidence for this is seen in the results of the survey. Too many churches have so been so swamped by other belief systems that they have either bought in or been overwhelmed and defeated by them. There are even entire denominations which are crumbling from within as they fight over such things as whether or not homosexuality is a sin and whether or not Jesus' death and resurrection were actual events which supply the means for the salvation of mankind. As a result, these churches are not helping their members understand the fight they are in and not giving them the tools to stand strong in their faith.

So what happens? Since people don't seem to be able to find the answers to the yearning of their hearts in the church, they begin looking, in large numbers, for other places and ways to have their spiritual needs met.

The problem here is a worldview problem. Society is laying a worldview foundation which says that ultimate reality is founded strictly on the natural world or on some set of spiritual principles which is contrary to Christian teachings. To the degree that people buy into that, they are not looking to a personal relationship with God to meet their need. The result is, they look somewhere else.

In order for Christians to reverse that trend, we must go to go back to square one and once again lay out a Christian worldview foundation in a way which helps people have confidence in their own faith. With this, they will have the motivation to share that faith with people who are moving in a different direction.

So, what exactly is necessary for us to pull this off? How can we make sure that we, personally, have the right perspective and are channeling our energies in a direction which will make a difference?

In order to turn the tide, there are two things which we must do. First of all, we must understand the problem and deal with it on a personal level. Secondly, we must make our own personal relationship with God a real and active personal relationship. Let's look at these briefly and see why these are so critical.

Understanding the Problem and Dealing with it on a Personal Level

This first matter relates to understanding worldview. I know we hammer on this a lot, and that it is not understood as a critical matter by most people. But the fact is, everything that we do in life, without exception, is based on our worldview foundation. You cannot address any issue in life outside of that truth. So the question becomes: What do you do when you confront a person who is a Secular Humanist or a Wiccan or a Buddhist or a Jehovah's Witness? Do you know what they believe? Do you know how they think? Can you share Christ with them in a way that allows them to understand? If one of them attacks your faith, are you able to turn the tables and help them understand why their attack is baseless? And even more telling, do you think that it is important to even be able to do this?

Your answers to these questions reveal two important things. First, they reveal whether or not your own worldview is based on a Biblical view of life. If you don't see the need, you are obviously coming from a worldview belief system that is not based on the Bible. Secondly, they reveal whether or not you have the tools to engage people who have other belief systems with the gospel message. For instance, if you try to share the love of God with someone who says they don't believe in God (or who has an entirely different understanding of God), simply giving a gospel presentation may not make sense to them.

The whole purpose of MarketFaith Ministries is to provide you with the tools you need to stand with confidence in your own Christian faith and to share the love of God with those who don't know him. An understanding of worldview is not an option any more for Christians who are serious about living a life of obedience to Christ.

Making Our Personal Relationship with God a Real and Active Personal Relationship

The second matter we must address if we want to turn the tide of people converting to other beliefs is that we must make our own relationship with God personal and vital. A great knowledge of the facts and possibilities, even regarding worldview, is not enough to motivate us to actually live our lives for Christ. The only thing that can do that is for us to continually experience a personal and active relationship with him.

The real question is: How real is God to you? If you truly believe that God is a real person with whom you are able to have a real, objective relationship, it changes the way you evaluate and live life.

Here's how this concept plays out. If God is, to you, simply an abstract concept or principle, then the service you do becomes impersonal – like a duty or a good deed. In this case, you do the deed because it seems right to do good deeds. Now, most Christians will acknowledge intellectually that God is, indeed, a real person. But all too often the intellectual acknowledgment does not translate into an actual personal interaction.

On the other hand, if we know God as a real person and learn how to listen to him speak directly to our minds, and if we can use our imagination properly to experience his actual presence with us, we become able to interact with him in the same way that we interact with people who have physical bodies. When we can experience God as an actual person that we personally interact with, our service then becomes personal and we do it out of love for him rather than out of a sense of duty. The difference that this makes regarding our motivation to serve God is dramatic.

Helping People Who Are Confused

If we want to be able to deal with the struggles which cause people to change religions and turn away from Christ, we must deal with their beliefs on a worldview level. People won't turn away from Christ if they know him as a real person and experience his work in their lives. By the same token, people won't stay with a church or a religion which does not give them peace in their hearts and assurance of the rightness of their beliefs.

If we wish to be instruments of God to help people who are struggling with the truth about Jesus Christ, we must know and be convinced, at a worldview level, that our own faith is the truth. Then, we must be able to articulate that truth to others in a way that helps them understand and become convinced in their own hearts. When enough Christians become able to take this step, we will begin to stem the tide of people drifting away from faith in Jesus Christ.

74. The Difficulty of Changing Worldviews

By Freddy Davis

As Christians, we have been given a Great Commission by Jesus himself to make disciples of all peoples. In other words, evangelism must be an integral part of our lives if we are going to be faithful as believers. As such, we are compelled to prepare ourselves for the task. This preparation involves not only learning the content of the gospel, it also requires that we engage people in life and verbally share it with them.

But I am afraid that most Christians don't really understand the true significance of what we are being asked to do. If a person that we try to witness to is going to accept Christ, they are not only going to have to understand the message, they are also going to have to be willing to accept a new life – which includes both ideas and actions. This is a much bigger task than we are typically aware of.

Usually when we deal with the topic of witness, we think of it from our own perspective – that of the witnesser. Today we want to look at it from the side of the witnessee. As we share a witness, it is important for us to understand the implications of accepting Christ from the perspective of the one who must do it. If we can grasp this perspective, we can gain new sensitivity and insight about how we should approach the process.

When we invite someone to accept Christ, what are we really asking them to do? For one thing, we are asking them to literally change their worldview. We are asking them to change how they understand the very structure of reality. Those who have not spent the time to understand what worldview is all about may not realize the significance of this request.

But the fact is, our worldview is the single most basic set of assumptions that we have regarding life and the world. It is, literally, the way they understand reality to be structured. For an individual to change, two things must happen.

First, a person must understand the belief they are being asked to adopt. There are exceptions but, for the most part, people only know how to understand reality based on the way they were brought up. They simply don't know any other way – or even that there is another way. The further away the Christian faith is from their own understanding of reality, the more difficult it will be for them to even comprehend the meaning of the gospel message.

Secondly, they have to be convinced that what you are proposing is true, as opposed to what they already believe, and must be willing to put aside their old beliefs for the new one.

Depending on the situation, the consequences of this can be very dramatic. Many people are simply not willing to make that step.

So, just what are some of the things that people may have to change? Some possibilities include:

- -- the way they think,
- -- the way they talk,
- -- certain habits that they are "hooked" on,
- -- the friends they hang out with,
- -- how they schedule their week,
- -- their relationship with family,
- -- their standing in society,
- -- or their job.
- -- And in some places it could even cause a threat to their very life.

Another thing that we must be aware of is that it is quite possible that they have had some kind of very negative experience in their past related to the Christian faith. It may be that they saw great hypocrisy in supposedly Christian parents, or the church they grew up in. This may have driven them deep into a different worldview position as they looked for truth and consistency. If this is the case, helping them regain trust in a faith they have come to despise may be quite a challenge.

So, how should this affect the way we think about witnessing? Well, the first thing it should do is to make us more patient and compassionate toward those we wish to share our faith with.

Making a decision to follow Christ is literally calling for an individual to *die* to self. While this concept is quite familiar, and perhaps even mundane, to those of us who already know Christ, it is a really big deal to those whose whole life has been wrapped around *living* for self. Because the life change being advocated is so deep, profound, and life altering, most people need time to process this for their lives. And the amount of time they need is usually dependent on the strength of their commitment to their current worldview position.

Calling on someone to make a decision to follow Christ may also be asking them to understand a way of organizing reality that is very different than what they already know. Dealing with this is not simply a matter of listening to a gospel presentation and making a decision to follow Christ. They have to literally reorient themselves to a different way of thinking. This will very likely take some time because this level of understanding doesn't just happen. Not only do they have to learn new information, but they must also figure out the implications that this decision has for *every* aspect of their lives.

It is important to remember that the implications of following Christ go to the very core of a person's sense of who they are and how they live. It goes all the way to their very understanding of reality – their worldview.

As we seek to share a witness to those who are separated from God, we need to be very sensitive to where they are. We certainly don't want to miss an opportunity to lead someone to the Lord, but we also don't want to push people to make a decision before they are ready to do it. For the most part, those who are pushed to make a firm decision before they understand the implications of that decision will fall away very quickly and will end up further away from following Christ than they were before.

Our understanding of worldview, and the implications it has for life, is critical knowledge for Christians in a way that has not been true in times past. We live in a society where more and more of a percentage of the population does not acknowledge Christ. Recognizing and

understanding the true nature of the task before us means that we have to know where people are coming from in their faith and how to interface with their lives in ways which make sense to them. It is a daunting task. But it is worth it if it allows us to be faithful to God as we seek to work alongside him in building his kingdom.

75. "Not My Brother" By Freddy Davis

Recently the new governor of Alabama, Robert Bentley, was speaking in a church service and made the Biblical assertion, "Anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior, I'm telling you, you're not my brother and you're not my sister, and I want to be your brother."

When word of his witness became known to the public, you would think he had murdered someone. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) called his remarks "shocking." The president of the Birmingham Islamic Society said he should keep his faith confined to his "private life." An opinion writer for The Birmingham News blasted him saying, "He is not a civilian anymore; he is not a private person anymore" It seems that it is the opinion of non-believers in modern society that once people enter public life they have to check their faith at the door. While this concept may seem reasonable and right to many, what is being asked is hypocritical on the one hand and impossible on the other.

The hypocritical part relates to the fact that the ones doing the criticizing are advocating for their own faith. They would not be complaining if the one speaking said things they agreed with. It is only because Bentley was advocating a specifically Christian position that they got all bent out of shape.

But the real crux of the matter is that the critics' desire for Bentley to be strictly neutral is a total impossibility. The reason for this is that a, so called, neutral position is, itself, a faith position. Every position that everyone takes on every topic has an underlying foundation that is built on the faith presuppositions of the individual.

For instance, the whole focus of the ADL is "tolerance." What this means to them is that no belief is more correct than another. As such, all should be treated the same no matter what. This is, in fact, a faith presupposition. It assumes that there is no such thing as truth and that all expressions of faith are equal.

Of course, the presuppositions of the president of the Birmingham Islamic Society are obvious on the surface. They believe Islamic teachings are the truth and object to a public official advocating another point of view. It is interesting, though, that you never hear them criticizing public officials in Islamic countries for advocating Islam – even while participating in official government activities.

As for the opinion writer for The Birmingham News, he appears to be a secularist. But secularism is also a faith position. Like the ADL, he is assuming that there is no such thing as objective truth. That being the case, the governor should not be speaking as if there is.

The question is, why should the faith position of these other people trump the faith position of the governor? By not speaking out, he would be agreeing that the other faith positions are more valid than the Christian one.

Now, certainly, as governor, he is not tasked with making religious pronouncements and working overtly to make converts on the job. But the values which inform his work come from

somewhere – they are either Christian values or values from some other system. There simply is no such thing as a value neutral approach to life.

But in this case, Governor Bentley was not even acting in his capacity as governor. He was a private individual expressing his Christian faith in a Christian church. Based on this, his critics have gone over the top.

Unfortunately, this is where we are in America. And the problem is not limited to those in public office. All Christians are being pressured by those with other faith presuppositions to give up their faith and kowtow to the faith of political correctness.

As Christians, we have a different mandate. Our marching orders should come from God, not from secular American society. We are commissioned by Christ himself to share our faith with non-believers. We are admonished in the Bible to recognize that there is such a thing as objective truth and that true truth is found in the Bible. The Bible does teach that those outside of Christ are not spiritual brothers and sisters with believers. The Bible does teach that those who don't know Christ won't experience eternal life. Advocating a different position means that a person is operating from some other – non-Christian – point of view.

Whether it is a state governor or a private individual, Christians need to be willing and able to stand up for the truth of the gospel, regardless of what people from other faiths say. Our faith is not inferior to theirs. In fact, it is the getting away from Christian principles and turning to non-Christian values that has created most of the problems that our society is experiencing today. Christians can be faithful to Christ without being obnoxious. And that is exactly what we need to do. We must begin to stand up and live out our faith authentically if we wish to see the blessings of God poured out on us once again.

76. How to Be a Christian Fanatic Without Acting Fanatical By Freddy Davis

I believe that one of the great fears that many Christians have is that the people with whom they interact in society will look down on them as being strange or "fanatic." This fear is actually unfounded in most cases. Most of the people who are considered friends and colleagues tend to accept those they interact with regardless of religious belief – at least at a certain level.

But there are always those militant or obnoxious people who try to quiet Christians by putting down their faith. There are various reasons people do this. Some of them are true believers in some other belief system and are actively advocating for their own faith. Others are people who are running from God and use these kinds of tactics to keep Christians from witnessing to them. Still others are just obnoxious people who use tactics like that to get the upper hand on their "competition."

As Christians, what we believe really is the truth. We don't need to be apologetic or fearful about it. At the same time, we can be effective witnesses without being obnoxious. However, if we are going to pull this off, there are some things that will help us in this arena.

Be Knowledgeable

Perhaps one of the most neglected elements of faith life for most Christians lies in education. No one can become competent in any field without laying down a knowledge foundation – and this is true for our Christian faith, as well. We expect our "professional" Christian leaders to get a good theological education, but tend to have no such expectation for the man/woman in the pew.

But this is just wrong. As Christians, we have both a vocation and a calling. In the case of professionals, the two overlap in the same field. But "the man in the pew" is called into full time Christian ministry just as surely as the professionals. It is just that the calling is lived out from a different vocational platform. That being the case, it is just as important for "non-professional" Christians to become theologically literate as for the professionals.

But most Christians don't have that expectation of themselves – which leads to the lack of growth we see in the modern church. Pastors need to provide in-depth training opportunities for their people – either by themselves or using various kinds of other resources. On the other side, Christians in the pew ought to be clamoring for that kind of training. The effectiveness of a Christian community rises and falls on the knowledge base of the congregation. This does not mean that a person must have a seminary education to be a Christian. But it does mean that the effectiveness of the Christian is much more limited without being thoroughly grounded in the faith. It is this knowledge base that provides a platform for a Christian to be a Christian fanatic (active in living out his or her faith) without being fanatical.

Be Convinced

Truly walking with God is not simply a matter of doing what the Bible says at an intellectual level. If the Christian faith really represents the truth, God is a real person who can be known in a real personal relationship.

Most Christians acknowledge that truth intellectually, but many don't actually live out the implications of their faith in daily life. To truly walk with God means spending time intimately conversing with him and following what he says. When a person truly knows God in this kind of relationship, the evidence of that is seen in the fruit of the individual's life. It is evidenced in their attitudes, speech, relationships, actions and, literally, every other part of life.

If you want to be a fanatic without seeming fanatical, your walk with God must be completely genuine. Before you can show truth to someone else, that truth has to be a viable part of your own life.

Be Genuine

If you truly want to be 100% focused on God without coming across as a fanatic, one the critical elements that must be in place is to avoid coming across as a hypocrite. You must walk the walk or people will not take you seriously. In fact, hypocrisy may be the biggest factor in turning people away from the Christian faith.

If God truly is a real, objective person as we claim, then we must live our lives in a relationship with him. This includes expressing language and a lifestyle that conforms to the very character of God himself. People who not only talk the talk but also walk the walk are respected, not reviled – even if the respect is begrudging.

Be Relational

People tend not to think negatively about people they are friends with – even if they mightily disagree on various issues. When a friendship exists, it is possible to have respect for the person "in spite of" the differences. In that case, a person may not like your position, but they will see you as a person rather than objectify you as a "fanatic."

The relationship element is vitally important when it comes to the possibility of sharing our faith with people who come from different belief systems. When the respect of a relationship exists, it is possible to have a civil discussion of differences. When no relationship exists, people

tend rather to talk past each other since the overriding concern becomes trying to make their own case rather than being personal.

The Nice Fanatic

No one wants to be referred to as a "fanatic" – that is unless it is meant in a positive way. As Christians, we certainly do want to be known as one who takes our faith seriously. We want people to know what we stand for and to have the ability to effectively partner with God to bring people into his kingdom. We can do this as we become more knowledgeable about our faith, are fully convinced of our belief on a personal level, express our faith in a truly genuine way and become good with relationships. At that point, we put ourselves in a position to be a powerful instrument of God to accomplish his purpose in the world.

77. Why Does It Matter? By Tal Davis

"Dr. Davis," the young woman collegian said impatiently. "I just don't think it is right for you to be criticizing other people's religions. They have a right to believe as they please. You have your beliefs and they have theirs. I believe we should just live and let live."

For the last 30 years or so I have been involved in interfaith witness research and training. Sometimes I have encountered people like this woman who question the need for what Dr. Freddy Davis and I and many others do in the field of worldview witnessing. For many of them it is a matter of not believing it is necessary since they assume all religions are essentially the same and equally valid. Others don't think it matters since all religions are equally wrong and invalid. Even some Christians argue that we should not worry about what others believe but that we only need to preach the Gospel and let God work it out.

I agree that people have legal right to believe as their consciences tell them. However, my conviction is that it is unbiblical to ignore those who are committed to false teachings, whether they be atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, Muslims, Mormons, or followers of any of the myriad competitors to Christianity that exist today in America. From the beginning to the end of the Bible, the prophets, apostles, and Jesus Himself warned of false teachers who would lead God's people astray and the responsibility they have to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ to all people. Thus, there are several good reasons why we do apologetics and interfaith ministry today.

One reason is that we are surrounded in modern society with people holding all kinds of worldviews and religious perspectives. My wife and I reside in the small the community of Suwanee, Georgia. On any day of the week, we commonly encounter people of diverse nationalities and religions in neighborhoods, stores, schools, doctors' offices, restaurants, or in the gym. Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Roman Catholics, Jews, and many others live and work in our town. We are no longer the exception to the rule. This diversity is true today in nearly every city in America. Therefore, as Christians and fellow citizens we need basic understanding of who these people are and what their worldviews are so we can develop good relationships with them.

Another reason we need interfaith witnessing is that some of these religions aggressively seek to proselytize Christians to their counterfeit faiths. How many times have you been confronted at your door by Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormon missionaries? Muslims also actively seek converts

in this country to Islam, particularly among certain people groups and in prisons. We must educate Christians as to the unbiblical natures of these belief systems so they will not be deceived and so they can adequately counter the false claims of cults and world religions.

The final, and most important reason we need to do interfaith and worldview witnessing is that Jesus commanded his disciples to carry the Gospel to all peoples. Salvation is found in no other name but that of Jesus. We would be remiss to ignore the needs of those in the darkness of false faiths. We are compelled by God's love to reach out and demonstrate His care to others. In many cases, we need to be aware of the presuppositions and ideas that may hinder their acceptance of the truth and be able to present reasonable answers why Christ is supreme.

It does matter what people believe. It also matters that if they are without Christ they are lost. Jesus is the truth and our goal is find effective ways to share His love with all those around us. I am excited to be joining with Dr. Freddy Davis in MarketFaith Ministries as we work together to equip Christians in this task.

78. The Great Christian Witness Dilemma By Freddy Davis

Throughout my entire life, I have been involved in an evangelical church. One strength of evangelicals is that we take seriously Christ's admonition to believers to go and share the gospel. It is interesting, though, how people can interpret this commission so differently and how it actually plays out in the life of the average Christian. Even though most evangelical Christians acknowledge that witness is an important element of the Christian life, it is not always seen as a personal admonition.

For instance, some regard Christ's commission as something the "church" (meaning the professional clergy) should do. They believe that the responsibility of individual members is simply to "support" the professionals in their efforts. Thus, they give their money to keep the lights on in their local organization and hire pastors, church staff and missionaries to "spread the word." Even those who acknowledge at least a small personal element, tend to do nothing more than perhaps invite people to come to church if an opportunity presents itself.

These support initiatives are not intended to be an indictment against the motives of Christians who are not personally active in sharing their faith. I'm sure that many who think like this really do love the Lord and believe the gospel needs to be spread. But it does indicate a problem within our merry band of believers which diminishes our effectiveness in bringing the gospel to the world.

This is not a "single issue" problem. There are several big picture matters which create this dilemma. Let's take a moment and look at the major hindrances to our ability to effectively share Christ with the world.

Lack of an Understanding of the Nature of Our Calling

Many Christians believe that there are certain people who are called into ministry and everyone else basically has the duty to support those professionals. While this is a common belief, it is a horribly unbiblical concept. The main problem with this view begins with a misunderstanding of the very concept of calling. There are actually three different ways that the idea of calling is used in the New Testament.

The first calling is the call to enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This one is issued to every single human being who is ever born. It is God's will that every person enter that relationship with him. In fact, this is the very reason God created humanity in the first place. We find this expressed in 2 Peter 3:9 where it is written, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [NIV] Of course, not everyone responds to God in the way he desires. There are those who never turn to God and, thus, don't answer the call. Those who do respond enter a personal relationship with him which continues even after death.

The second call is given to every single person who positively responds to the first. God calls every believer into Christian ministry. This is not to be mistaken for a calling into *vocational* Christian ministry. This call is clearly spelled out in Ephesians 4:11-13 where we read, "(11) It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." [NIV] We clearly see in this passage that it is not the church's professional leadership who is responsible for all of the church's ministry. Rather, the leaders are charged to equip all of the other Christians in the church to do the ministry.

This teaching actually puts the "person in the pew" as the primary ministry agent of God in the world. And it should be noted that this calling is not performed merely in a church setting – though many Christians do have an element of their calling which is fulfilled within the church organization. Rather, the primary work of ministry for most Christians is done out in society – on the job, in social circles, in the marketplace and the like. Literally, every believer is called into full time Christian ministry.

The third calling has already been alluded to and is the one most people think about when this topic comes up. That is, the calling into professional church leadership. Of those who respond to the second call, God selects some for a third calling. That third calling is into vocational church leadership. And as we saw above, the work of these professionals is to equip the saints for ministry, not to do all of the work of ministry themselves. There is no way that a small group of church leaders can reach out and touch all of the people God wants to reach. It is only as the entire body of believers take seriously their call to ministry, and are trained to be effective in that ministry, that the fullness of the work of God can be accomplished.

Ignorance

A second problem that keeps many Christians from being effective in sharing their faith is ignorance, pure and simple. There is a knowledge base that Christians must master in order to effectively share their faith.

This knowledge base begins with an understanding of our own faith. If we are going to share the message of salvation, we have to know the content of the message and how to share it with those who don't know Christ.

While the knowledge base begins with an understanding of our own faith, it doesn't end there. We also need to have an understanding of the faith of those we are trying to reach. This is important in every case, but is even more critical when dealing with people who have a worldview foundation that is not Christian.

Too many believers are simply not equipped with the knowledge they need to be effective witnesses. There is no excuse for this. The knowledge is readily available and the call is in place

which admonishes us to become equipped for God's service. The problem of ignorance exists because many Christians simply don't take their calling seriously and never make the effort to lay the necessary knowledge foundation in themselves.

Active Opposition

A third problem in sharing the gospel comes about because of active opposition to the Christian faith. Serious opposition is a relatively new phenomenon in American society, but in the overall scheme of things has existed from the days of Christ. Opposition and persecution put fear into the hearts of many Christians and cause them to keep quiet about their faith.

No one likes to be put down and made to feel stupid or in jeopardy. Much of the opposition that Christians face is literally designed to create just such feelings in order to shut us up. Depending on the particular form of opposition, believers may feel that they are being isolated or might even receive actual physical persecution (like jail or worse).

While we may have no control over the way people oppose our faith, we do have command over how we respond to it. The first action we must take is to equip ourselves to deal with it. There is no oppositional argument that can overcome the truth of the gospel. The bigger question is, "Have we equipped ourselves to deal with the enemies of Christ?" When we have a proper foundation in our lives, we can stand as strong witnesses in the face of any opposition.

Personal Lifestyle Problems

A final reason many Christians struggle in sharing their faith is because their personal lives do not match up to the moral standard that the gospel expresses. The call to be a Christian is also a call to live in holiness. God saved us so that we can overcome sin, not so that we can sin all we want and get forgiven for it. Sin is the one thing that will keep us out of fellowship with God, and overcoming it is the reason Christ died on the cross.

That being said, many Christians want to have their cake and eat it, too. They want their salvation to serve as eternal life insurance while continuing to live in the pleasures of sin during this life. Those in this category want to hold on to such things as using bad language, engaging sexual pleasures outside of marriage, treating other people badly, living for material gain and/or notoriety above all else, and the like.

For those who have this attitude, sharing Christ will be very uncomfortable. It makes one feel like a hypocrite to offer a person a life that demands holy living while personally continuing to live in sin. Because of their refusal to give up their sin, many Christians simply won't even consider sharing their faith with non-believers.

Sharing Eternal Life

Sharing eternal life with those who do not yet believe in Christ is not that hard. The knowledge necessary to do it is easily accessible. At the same time it is one of the most difficult parts of the Christian life. To pull it off we have to discipline our lives and actively live in our relationship with God. Ultimately, we have to make a decision. Are we going to put our relationship with Christ first or not? Once we make that decision, everything else naturally follows.

The great dilemma of Christian witness can be understood with the mind, but it plays out in daily life. It is expressed in the struggle to be obedient to Christ on a daily basis while living in relationship with him. When we grasp the truth of this concept and make the personal decision to

live in our relationship with Christ, the dilemma ends. This does not mean that we will become perfect. But it does put us on the road to fulfilling the very purpose for which we were created.

79. Why Is Sharing Our Faith So Difficult?

By Freddy Davis

I was recently at a conference and one of the speakers was admonishing the audience to be diligent in sharing their witness. Then, this speaker went on to make a couple of observations.

First, he acknowledged that there are some people who just have a gift – those who could lead a tree to the Lord. Continuing, he commented that the ones able to do that are actually very few. Most Christians don't have the ability, for one reason or another, to approach witnessing that way.

But he wasn't letting anyone off the hook. He said that all Christians are called to be witnesses and proceeded to give some guidance.

In doing that, he went through the "Roman Road" and told the audience to start their witnessing to a lost person by "Romans 3:23ing them" (Tell them that all have sinned). Following that he said to, "Romans 6:23 them" and share that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Next, you have to "Romans 5:8 them" (Share that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners). And finally, we have to "Romans 10:9-13 them" (Tell them to confess their sin and believe by calling out to God in the name of Jesus).

Now, there is nothing wrong with sharing the gospel using the "Roman Road" methodology. But that will only take you so far depending on who you are trying to share a witness with. If you are trying to share with someone who basically already believes in a Theistic worldview, then you shouldn't have much problem. Not that all of these people will accept Christ, but at least they will understand what you are talking about.

But what if you wanted to share with someone in the "Occupy Wall Street Crowd?" Most of them probably don't even believe in God, so "Romans 3:23ing them" is not really going to get you anywhere. In fact, they will probably ridicule your belief in the Christian "superstition."

Or, what if you wanted to share Christ with Episcopal priest who believes that homosexual marriage is just as valid as heterosexual marriage. Even though the priest will claim to believe in Christ, the meaning of "believe in Christ" will be entirely different than what you mean when you say it. To them, Christ might very well not even represent an objective person but a "universal principle of love." This kind of theology also doesn't believe in sin the way Christians think of it, so "Romans 3:23ing them" will not be helpful – at least not before you bring them to the place where they understand what you mean when you talk about God and sin.

In our current day, sharing the gospel is so much more complex than it used to be. That is not because the gospel message has changed, but because the variety of people we have the opportunity to share with is so much more diverse. It used to be that most people in America held a Theistic worldview. Not that all were Christians by any means, but they at least believed that God existed. But that simply is not so any more. Now, we are just as likely to meet Naturalists, Animists, Far Eastern Thought believers and non-Christian Theists as we are to meet those inclined to believe in the God of the Bible. And speaking the gospel to these diverse groups requires that we begin our message in different starting places.

If you witness to a person who already believes in the God of the Bible, just whipping out the "Roman Road" and "Romans 3:23ing them" is probably a good place to start. But what if they

are a Naturalist and don't believe in God? Before you can "Romans 3:23 them," you have to bridge the gap between their belief that God does not exist and your belief that he does. Until you bridge that gap, Romans 3:23 simply will not make any sense to them.

And the same problem exists with people who come from other worldview belief systems. If a person is an Animist, they believe in many gods. You have to bridge the gap between their belief in many and your belief in the one God of the Bible. Until then, Romans 3:23 makes no sense. If the person you want to share with is a Far Eastern Thought believer, their concept of ultimate reality is the impersonal life force. They don't believe in a personal God at all. Before sharing Romans 3:23, you must bridge the understanding gap between their assertion that no personal God exists and your affirmation of the personal God of the Bible. And even if they are a Theist but of a non-Christian variety, you have to bridge the gap between their God and yours if Romans 3:23 is to make any sense to them.

This is why an understanding of worldview is so critical. It gives us the starting point for witness and a basis for asserting that the God of the Bible is real and true. When we can grasp that foundation, we are in a position to share the gospel with anyone we meet, no matter what belief system they come from.

80. The Culture War is a Worldview War is a Gospel War By Freddy Davis

There are so many culture war expressions in modern society. It touches on everything from abortion, to the homosexual marriage debate, to the issues surrounding the concept of social justice, to how conscience rights are allowed to be expressed in society, to the interaction of religion and politics, and the list could go on. In modern society, the people on various sides of these issues are becoming more and more strident, and the result is not only a lot more noise regarding these issues, but an incredible amount of conflict, as well.

To understand this more fully, it is helpful to realize that the root of the various culture war conflicts rest in competing worldviews. Different worldview foundations lead to different values. And as the intensity of people's beliefs increase, the lengths they will go to promote their own, and fight against others, also increases.

Let's look at the abortion issue as one example. A Christian worldview considers human life to be valuable because human beings are special creations of God – created in his image. As such, abortion is seen to be murder – the taking of an innocent life. A Naturalistic worldview, on the other hand, sees things quite differently. To a Naturalist, a human being is simply another animal creature – no better and no worse than any other animal. Beyond that, the emergence of life, itself, is believed to be merely a chance natural occurrence with no intrinsic meaning whatsoever. The only meaning it has is the meaning assigned to it by creatures which have the capability to think about meaning – human beings. And even the meaning various humans assign to life can change if the situation changes. Regarding the particular topic we are considering here, Naturalists believe it can legitimately be judged by a culture that a preborn baby is harmful, rather than helpful, to society and is, thus, expendable. For many Naturalists, abortion is a viable remedy to the inconvenience of a pregnancy.

What we see here are different worldview positions which express themselves based on different values and result in different actions. The root of it all is the worldview beliefs.

But for Christians, understanding the root of the problem is not enough. We must grasp one more concept. We need to look at the means by which the culture wars ought to be addressed. As it relates to how we deal with conflicting worldviews, there are two matters which we ought to consider. Both are important and neither should be neglected. That being said, one is more critical than the other.

This first matter relates to taking action to actually counter the activity of those who oppose a Christian worldview. Continuing with the example above, Christians ought to be advocating for an end to abortion. There are many ways to do this, and individuals need to find their appropriate means – whether it is giving money to anti-abortion groups, volunteering to help at pregnancy centers, or working to change the laws of the land.

But there is a second matter that is even more critical. The reason anti-Christian positions exist in the first place is that there are people who hold worldview beliefs which oppose our Christian worldview. Ultimately, the only way it is possible to completely resolve culture war issues in our favor is to create a situation where the objective truth about the nature of reality can win the day. This requires that those opposing the Christian worldview be led to a different point of view. And the means God has provided to accomplish that is for those opponents to enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Non-believers are looking in some other place for their salvation (ultimate meaning for their lives). But in truth, the only place authentic salvation can be found is in authentic truth – a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I have tried to make my point as simply as I possibly can. The root of every battle in the culture war has to do with opposing worldviews fighting against one another. We cannot avoid fighting the various battles in the war. But the ultimate goal is not to win battles, it is to win the war. And the only way the war can be won is to bring the masses to our side. And how do we do that? By leading the world to Jesus Christ!

God has clearly revealed that he desires "his will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He has also clearly commissioned all believers to "go into all the world and make disciples." As Christians, we must get serious about fulfilling the task God has called us to. We must become proficient at building a worldview bridge so that people can understand the gospel message, then we must actually build a gospel bridge so they can specifically come to Christ. Only when we, as the body of Christ, get serious about doing both of these tasks, can we win the culture war. This will not be done simply by participating in church activities week after week. We must become serious students of our faith (true disciples), learn the skills for doing the work of God in the world, and actively involve ourselves in building His kingdom.

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