



WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL
Volume 10 Number 15
April 15, 2015

What You Need to Know: Christian Worldview Context

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Previously we looked at the fact that in order to be effective in sharing the gospel, it is necessary to understand the concept of worldview. There is another cache of knowledge concerning worldview that is also essential – and that is an understanding of the Christian worldview itself. This information provides the context for and explanation of the Christian faith.

As we explore this Christian worldview context, we can do so by dividing it into five parts. These five parts include: Creation, the Fall, Life after the Fall, Redemption, and Eternity. Let's take a look at these five parts to see what the Christian faith is all about.

Creation

In order to truly grasp the significance of the Christian faith, it is necessary to begin before the creation of the material universe and delve into the very mind of God. Without an understanding of the purpose of God in the creation, nothing about the Christian faith ultimately makes sense.

The beginning of the Christian story has its roots in the creation of mankind. Before God created man in his own image, there were no created beings which fit into this category. There were other created beings, but they did not have the characteristic of being created in the image of God.

At some point, though, God made the decision to create another class of being which would have the personhood characteristics of God himself. This does not mean that he set out to create another god, or even that this new creature would

have these characteristics to the same degree as himself. But he did give mankind the personhood characteristics to the degree that human beings could be characterized as persons. This provided the possibility that God and man would be capable of interacting with each other in a personal relationship. With the creation of this new creature, a unique being came into existence capable of sharing a personal relationship with him. It is certainly not that God had a personal "need" to do this, as he has no needs outside of himself. But based on his own purposes, he made this move.

So, at this point, we can see God's purpose in the creation of mankind – to have a creature he could interact with in a personal relationship. However, for that purpose to become a reality, a place for this being to live had to be made. So God created the material universe where this new creature would live. Before this creative event, there was no such thing as the material reality that we now know. God conceived of it in his own mind and created it out of nothing.

Within that material universe, God made one place perfectly capable of sustaining the physical life of this new creature – Earth. And when it was ready for man, it was a literal paradise. It was God's purpose that he and man would physically enjoy one another's company eternally in this place. To achieve his purpose, God manifested himself as a physical being on this physical earth in order to share fellowship with his new creature. Of course, he was still God in eternity and was not limited to his earthly manifestation, but he did accommodate himself to the earth to fulfill his purpose. So out of his purpose, and when the earth was ready, God created mankind in his own image.

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The first person God created in this process was Adam – the first man. Adam was soon followed by the first woman, Eve. With this creation, God was able to, and did, have fellowship with a person like himself.

In the beginning, mankind was perfect. There was no sin and no sin nature to pollute the new creation God had established. In those days, God and man physically interacted with one another on the physical earth without interference. They enjoyed intimate and unrestricted fellowship in the paradise that was Earth.

The Fall

The concept of the Fall gets to the very heart of the human condition as it exists today. It allows to us understand why human beings are separated from God, and why it is so difficult for us to live a life in close personal fellowship with him. It also gives us an understanding of our very nature. Knowing these things is essential for understanding ourselves and what is necessary to repair our separation from God.

In dealing with this topic, it is important to understand that the Fall, along with the events following the Fall which God put in place to create a fix, are all actual history. The Fall and redemption from sin are actual matters that humanity must deal with in the physical existence in which we live. Our human tendency to sin leads to actual expressions of sin which places genuine guilt on our lives. This guilt must somehow be removed for our separation from God to be repaired.

In the beginning, as we saw above, God created a being capable of interacting with him in a personal relationship. The relationship that God had with the first man and woman in the initial stages exactly fit his purpose. It was completely

intimate and unhindered. God and man enjoyed perfect fellowship as they lived together in the earthly paradise he had created.

Unfortunately, there came a time when Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed God and did the one thing that could break fellowship with him. When God placed them in the garden, he gave specific instructions that they could eat of any fruit they found except one. Everything was fine until one day when they made the decision to disobey this one restriction.

The thought to disobey was not their own, however. Another player entered the scene and set up the betrayal. This fact does not take away from the guilt of Adam and Eve for their disobedience. They could have made the choice to obey God, but didn't.

On that fateful day, Satan, the leader of a band of angels who had rebelled against God and was kicked out of heaven, took the form of a beautiful serpent and approached Eve with the idea of eating the forbidden fruit. His portrayal of that act convinced her that doing so was not a bad thing at all. In fact, his deception was that this fruit was exceedingly good to the point that it would make them like God himself. As it turned out, this temptation was strong enough to entice Eve, then Adam, to do the one thing God told them not to do. The result of that act introduced sin into the world and caused the destruction of the unrestricted fellowship that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with God.

The evil that entered the created order penetrated to the very core of humanity in general. As a result, the nature of mankind was infected with sin. Every human being born since that time has inherited that sin nature. This nature predisposes us to express sin through our lives in the way we think and act. As a result, all human beings are sep-

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parated from God because of this evil within.

But the results of the Fall had an even wider result than the separation of man from intimate fellowship with God. As it turned out, evil was not just a spiritual concept. It had a physical manifestation which also affected the material universe God originally created as a perfect paradise. The result was the instability of the natural universe in such things as earthquakes, volcanoes, tornados, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, sickness, disease, and the like.

The Fall had a spiritual root, but it resulted in catastrophic physical manifestations, as well. The evil that it brought into God's created order caused mankind to take on a sin nature which separated him from intimate fellowship with God and caused the natural universe to begin to come apart.

Life after the Fall

After sin entered the world, it became the primary principle which ruled the universe. The ultimate result was that it corrupted the perfect creation God had made.

The first problem introduced was physical death. Prior to the Fall, physical death did not exist.

The second problem was spiritual death – eternal separation from God. With physical death, the possibility emerged that some of the beings who were created in his image would not ultimately enjoy eternity in God's presence. At physical death, the ultimate destination of individual human beings is settled based on the choices they make during physical life. Those who choose God will enjoy eternity with him, while those who choose not to follow him will be eternally separated from him.

Throughout history, mankind has struggled with the consequences of the Fall. We struggle with the effects of sin in the physical world and with sin's effects in human life. It wreaks havoc in society in such ways as poverty, war, abortion, homosexuality and many other problems. It also does so in the live of individuals as we struggle to know God and interact with him in an intimate relationship.

Redemption

After Satan invaded God's creation and injected into it the sin virus in an attempt to destroy it, God could have simply destroyed the world and started over. However, he chose a different path. Rather than allow that the Evil One had defeated him, God decided to overcome Satan and, in the process, fix (redeem) his creation.

To do this, he began a process to reverse the effects of sin introduced at the Fall. This process began with God's decision to send a redeemer into the world who would offer himself as a sacrifice in place of those separated from God because of their sin. This redeemer would have to be completely without sin and, thus, worthy of this position. As no other being was qualified, God determined that he, himself, would become this redeemer.

As the infection of sin had permeated the entire created order, the fix would require the redemption of everything that was affected by sin in order to reinstate his original purpose. Since the original purpose was to populate a perfect earth with creatures who would fellowship with him, God allowed the process of procreation to proceed. Only those individuals, however, who choose to spend eternity with him could be allowed the privilege of this fellowship. Those not choosing this path are destined to spend eternity outside of his presence.

As the history of the earth moved forward, God continuously revealed to mankind how to have this relationship with him. He revealed himself in nature, in the consciences of individual human beings, through specially called persons whom he divinely inspired to write Scripture, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and by his Holy Spirit.

The initial revelation was given directly to Adam and Eve and in the moral consciences of all their descendants. Beyond that, through the outworking of history, God revealed the nature of the redemptive process. Redemption would be based on a substitutionary sacrifice. The idea was that those who were tainted by sin would be forgiven by transferring their sin to a perfect, sinless person who would die in their place.

He chose the nation of Israel as keepers of the message and gave them the sacrificial system to be practiced in the temple. This system demonstrated how the process worked as sin was, symbolically, transferred from humans to animals which were sacrificed on the altar. This animal sacrifice did not literally provide for the forgiveness of sin as the animals being sacrificed were not capable of actually taking sin onto themselves. It did, however, foreshadow the actual sacrifice that would occur in the fullness of God's timing.

The actual sacrifice occurred when Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross. Jesus was not an ordinary man, but was God who stepped out of heaven and manifested himself as an actual human being. Before coming to earth, Jesus was a part of the godhead – the second person of the Trinity. When he came to earth, he was born in the normal way human beings are born. His conception was unique, however. He was not the product of the intimacy of a human man and woman. Rather, God performed a miracle by causing the Virgin Mary to become pregnant by the Holy Spirit in order that Jesus could be conceived in her womb. This was necessary so he could be born without the sin nature which is part and parcel of natural human existence.

In order for a person to qualify as the sacrifice for the sin of mankind, it was necessary for that individual to be sinless from birth to death. Thus, Jesus lived a sinless life which qualified him to become the sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

When he was finally crucified, Christ fulfilled God's requirements for undoing the sin problem. This pro-

cess was not merely for saving mankind, it was for completely reversing all the effects of the Fall. In his redemptive work, Christ provided redemption for the entire sin infected created order – mankind as well as the physical universe. God demonstrated his power and authority to accomplish this task with Christ's resurrection. Thus, the completion of the redemptive process was sealed.

At the time of the resurrection, however, the entire redemptive process was not yet fulfilled. The full number of human beings God desired to populate his creation was not yet complete. As a result, everything is currently in place for the culmination of God's plan. We are now only waiting for the fulfillment of this last requirement. That population is being built by the continuing redemption of those who willfully enter into a personal relationship with God based on the sacrificial death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In God's perfect timing, the redemptive fix will be completed in two parts. The first part we have already reviewed – the eternal salvation of human beings who have entered into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The second part will be the final redemption of the fallen created order.

Eternity

At physical death, those who invited Christ into their lives during their physical life on earth leave the physical body with its sin nature and enter directly into the presence of God. This begins the final phase of the salvation process in which the believer dwells with him for the rest of eternity.

This initial entry into heaven, however, is not the final step of God's redemptive plan. Redemption involves not only the salvation of the human person, but also the restoration of the created physical order corrupted by the introduction of sin. When the full number of believing human beings is accomplished according to God's plan, he will put an end to the sin corrupted created order and recreate it as a "new heaven and new earth." This will represent the restoration of God's original plan for eternal life.

At that point, all believers brought into the presence of God at their deaths will be physically resurrected to the new earth and given resurrected, glorified bodies. In this new condition, God will do what he originally did with Adam and Eve – he will dwell among us. At that point, all of the resurrected human beings will have direct access to God. We will experience him as a close friend as well as the Ruler of all creation.

In this new heaven and earth there will be no pain or sorrow or death. We will all do productive and purposeful work and will experience our eternal life as joyful and in no way monotonous or boring. It will be fulfilling and meaningful every moment of every day. It will truly be the ultimate expression of paradise. Believers will live eternally and experience the glory of God to the full extent that it is possible for each individual to do so.

In the end, God will have completely overcome the destructive attempt of Satan to disrupt his creation. The effects of sin will be overcome and the created order will emerge fully developed as God originally intended. He will have his created world and a class of eternal Kingdom citizens who will personally interact and engage him in a mutually loving relationship throughout eternity.

Why the Context is Important

Every belief system in existence has a way it understands the structure of reality, and that understanding shapes every thought and action of each individual who follows that belief. This is true of the Christian faith, as well. If we don't understand the worldview structure of our faith, it is impossible to use it as an intentional, conscious guide for life. But to the degree we do consciously understand that worldview foundation, we become able to intentionally use the tenets of our faith to construct our lives. And with that, it becomes possible to intelligently share our faith with people who do not know Christ.

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