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Why You Need Worldview Knowledge

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Periodically, it is good to just go over the worldview basics in order to keep ourselves centered. Worldview concepts apply in so many areas, and we write about so many topics that are expressions of worldview, that it can sometimes be easy to lose focus. So, this article takes us back to the very core of the subject.

In times past, in America, understanding worldview concepts was not nearly as important as in modern times. The principles underlying America's founding were based on a biblical worldview, and virtually every part of society was built on those worldview precepts. While not everyone faithfully lived out biblical beliefs in life, at the very least, most people's understanding of reality was informed by them, and when they didn't follow them, they understood they were doing wrong.

In recent times, however, all of that has changed. Beginning in the late 1800s, the beliefs of Naturalism began to rise, and people who held those beliefs increasingly moved into positions of influence within the various institutions of society. This influence continued to increase until, probably around the 1960s or 70s, it reached a tipping point. From that time on, naturalistic influence overtook the influence of biblical Theism, and society has seen a radical intellectual and moral shift since that time. Because of that, Christians who truly want to have an influence on society must understand the worldview clash that is happening – particularly the clash between Christian Theism and Naturalism.

Paradigm Possibilities

Traditional Paradigm

Before Naturalism became so strong, it was not even important for American Christians to understand this worldview system. Almost everyone understood and lived by the beliefs of Christian Theism. So, when Christians came across someone who was not a believer, it was not necessary to explain to them how Christians viewed reality. Most already understood reality that way. At the very least they were raised in an environment that assumed the existence of the God of the Bible. In most cases it was not necessary to convince them that the God of the Bible existed, all that was necessary was to share with them how to know him.

As such, churches developed methods for sharing Christ and talking about God that assumed people already knew and understood the biblical approach. This traditional approach naturally came to dominate the entire thinking of American churches.

Worldview Paradigm

With the change in society due to the rising influence of Naturalism, however, those previous assumptions do not necessarily hold. Naturalists, for example, don't believe in the existence of God. So, if we talk to them starting with the assumption that they understand and/or believe that the God of the Bible exists, they will, in a very literal sense, not understand our message. To deal with this problem, we need to shift our communication strategy from our traditional paradigm to a worldview paradigm.

A worldview paradigm certainly includes the information from our tradition. After all, it is the traditional

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Worldview Resources

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paradigm that contains the content of the gospel message itself. But in order to bridge a worldview gap, we also need to include other information. We need to additionally explain the differences between the various worldview beliefs in a way that helps non-believers understand those differences. And we not only need to be able to explain the "what" of our beliefs (traditional paradigm), but also "why" our beliefs are true (worldview paradigm).

Worldview Definition

At this point, we need to actually define worldview. It is a word that has become increasingly used over the last several years, but which very few actually understand. The word itself gives the sense that its meaning has something to do with how people "view the world," but that is actually a little too simplistic. That definition is certainly not "wrong," but it is a very incomplete and shallow definition.

Beyond simply "how people view the world," it has to do with how people distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy. A formal definition is: **Worldview is the assumptions people make about the nature of reality.**

That formal definition, on the surface, may seem a little academic and esoteric, but it is actually quite straightforward. An assumption is nothing more than a belief that seems so obvious, that people simply accept it without needing further proof. The "nature of reality" is nothing more than an affirmation of what actually exists. So, putting it all together, a worldview is simply a person's understanding of what is real vs. what is fantasy that seems so obvious, that it would be considered ludicrous to even question it. Everyone, without exception, has a set of worldview beliefs that they never even question, because to do so

would be to question what they believe to be real vs. what they believe to be fantasy.

Worldview Concept

To grasp this further, we need to understand that there are actually two types of faith systems – worldview systems and belief systems. Breaking it down further, there are only four worldview categories, but there are very many belief systems. Belief systems are based on, and emerge out of, worldview systems. We need to be able to distinguish between these two in order to truly understand our own beliefs and those of other people.

"Worldview beliefs" are more basic and foundational. It is a category of beliefs that form the substructure for everything we think and do. They are virtually never questioned, and are, in fact, so basic that most people are not even aware of their existence. They simply accept the tenets of their worldview beliefs without question.

"Belief systems" are the category of beliefs that most people are actually personally aware of. These beliefs are an expression of some set of worldview beliefs, and are outwardly recognized as a specific religion, cult, or philosophy.

Worldview Essentials

Another important concept to understand regards worldview essentials. There is a way to define particular worldview systems, and this is done by answering three essential worldview questions. Every worldview system is able to answer all three questions, but each answers them in its own unique way. In fact, the way the various worldview systems answer these questions is so unique, that every worldview literally contradicts every other worldview. It is the answers to these worldview questions that actually defines a worldview system's understanding of what is real and what is fantasy. The three worldview questions have to do

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with a worldview system's belief about God, man, and salvation. These questions are specifically:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality? (God)
2. What is a human being? (Man)
3. What is the ultimate a person can achieve in this life? (Salvation)

Worldview Authority Sources

Authority sources are another important concept that we need to understand in order to grasp the full meaning of a worldview. While worldview beliefs are comprised of "assumptions," these assumptions are built upon some authority source that is not questioned. In fact, the acceptance of the authority source is the actual reason for the acceptance of the worldview beliefs themselves.

In order to get at the truth or falsity of a worldview system, its authority source does, indeed, need to be questioned, but typically it is not done. To question it would lead to the possibility that a person's understanding of reality could be turned on its head – which is very hard for most people to even imagine.

There are four primary authority sources: 1) Human Reason, 2) Tradition, 3) Human Experience, and 4) Revelation. Every worldview system will only have one primary authority source, though it will use some of the others as secondary sources.

The Four Worldviews

A worldview is a set of beliefs that defines the way an individual understands what is real vs. what is fantasy, and there are four basic worldview categories: 1) Naturalism, 2) Animism, 3) Far Eastern Thought, and 4) Theism. Every belief system in existence is an expression of one of these four (or a combination of two or more).

Naturalism

Naturalism is the belief that the entirety of existence is found in the

natural universe. There is no God, indeed no transcendent reality at all. Its primary authority source is human reason.

Animism

Animism is the belief that there is one overall existence, but it is divided into two parts – a material part and a spiritual part. Animists believe that there are living beings in both parts, and these beings interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship – what happens in one part directly affects what happens in the other. The primary authority source for Animism is tradition.

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought believes that ultimate reality is transcendent to the natural universe, and is both impersonal and immaterial. Far Eastern Thought believers believe that parts of this impersonal life force have spun off of the main body and moved far enough away that it has taken on a different character. This different character is both personal and material. It is this personal and material form that is expressed in the natural universe. Further, they believe that the spun off parts of the life force that are in the material world are working their way back to rejoin the transcendent main body by means of reincarnation, with karma as its driving engine. The primary authority source for Far Eastern Thought is human experience.

Theism

Theism is the belief that a transcendent God exists who is the creator and sustainer of the material universe. The character and nature of this God is different for each theistic belief system, but they all believe that this kind of being exists. The primary authority source for Theism is revelation. Additionally, each theistic belief system has its own revealed authority source.

Why it Is Important to Have Worldview Knowledge

For some people, a study of the topic of worldview will be nothing more than an academic exercise. For others, it is simply an attempt to relieve their curiosity. But for Christians, there are very practical reasons why understanding worldview concepts is important. It is not just a matter of becoming more knowledgeable, but of actually knowing God in a more deeply personal way, growing spiritually, and of putting oneself in a position to accomplish God's purpose and fulfill his commission. So just how can a knowledge of worldview provide all of this?

First, it helps Christians set aside doubts about their faith. In the pluralistic world we live in, we are bombarded with false beliefs. Beyond that, in some cases, those false beliefs are so dominant in society that there is actual pressure, even persecution, against those who are faithful to Christian beliefs. This pressure causes many to doubt their faith – and some to even disown it. The results of this are fully visible as we see church attendance dwindling, a dramatic rise in the number of people who claim to not believe in God at all, and massive numbers of young people leaving the faith when they get out from under their parent's roof. An understanding of worldview addresses this problem by explaining "why" our Christian faith is the truth, and non-Christian beliefs are not the truth.

A second reason worldview knowledge is important for Christians is that it helps us understand our Christian faith. The lack of biblical knowledge and Christian theology in the church is staggering. There are almost always a few who are knowledgeable, and who will rise to leadership in the Christian community because they have made the effort to understand biblical truth. But these people tend to be the exception rather than the rule. Most Christians simply do not even know how or where to draw the line between essential and non-essential beliefs. This lack of knowledge leads directly to a weak faith and an inability and unwillingness to share Christ out in the world. Knowledge of worldview concepts can help alleviate this problem.

The third reason a knowledge of worldview concepts is important is because it gives believers a framework for answering questions and objections non-believers may have about our faith. Additionally, it provides us with tools to understand and break down the beliefs of those who might attack us because of our faith. The Bible, in 1 Peter 3:15, admonishes Christians to be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us. Apologetics is a Christian discipline that specifically addresses this issue. Worldview knowledge provides us with the tools to engage this effectively.

Finally, worldview knowledge gives us the tools to capably share our faith. Most Christians recognize the importance of doing this, but relatively few have the confidence to actually do it. This partly relates to knowledge of what to say, but also to personal confidence that our beliefs are true – as opposed to the beliefs of the people we would like to share our faith with. There is so much information that is associated with the Christian faith, that it is easy to become overwhelmed, sidetracked, or intimidated. An understanding of worldview helps us filter out the noise by allowing us to distinguish between essential and non-essential knowledge. This makes it very easy to share our faith in any circumstance.

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It is important to understand that a knowledge of worldview principles is not a substitute for correct theology or biblical knowledge. Rather, it is a method of organizing our beliefs that gives us a way to easily understand our own Christian faith and the beliefs of others. With a solid grasp of this, our knowledge and sense of confidence about the truth of our Christian faith will soar.