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Worldview Discipleship
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In years past, in America, Christians could easily get away with a superficial understanding of their faith because it was pretty rare that anyone would challenge their beliefs. That was a time when most people actually went to church, at least on Easter and Christmas, when schools would not schedule sporting events on Wednesday evenings because that was prayer meeting night, when school children prayed The Lord's Prayer at the beginning of the school day, and when being a member of a church was a good look for one's business. In those days, it was pretty much assumed that people believed in God, and if someone came out as an Atheist, it was considered socially scandalous.

Of course, even in those days, not everyone was a Christian – even those who self-identified that way. A lot of people who did go to church only did it for show, or because that was their tradition. While they might not have had other scheduled events on Wednesdays, they, themselves, never went to prayer meeting. While the children may have repeated The Lord's Prayer at school, many, if not most, didn't really pray it sincerely – it was just a tradition repeated by rote. And many of the business people who were active in church really did view it as a means for making a good impression on people, and networking to promote their business. Yeah, those might have seemed like the "good ol days" for the church on a superficial level, but in some ways the church was a mile wide and an inch deep.

So how is it different today? Well, it's different in a very profound way. In modern society, the script

has, in many places, been completely flipped. Now, many people consider it scandalous to be associated with a church, church activities are not considered at all when schools schedule sporting, and other, events, it is against the law to have a school sanctioned prayer, and church is not considered to be a reputation enhancer for business. And, on top of that, it is not unusual at all for people to openly challenge the beliefs of Christians.

While in the past, a superficial understanding of one's Christian faith may have been sufficient in order to successfully navigate local society, in many places that is just not the case anymore. In fact, for people who actually do want to live out their Christian faith, it is not even enough to simply know what we believe – even at a deeper level. If we want to be able to stand upright in the radical anti-Christian society that currently exists, we not only need to know *what* we believe, but *why* what we believe is the truth. But even that is not enough in many cases. We even need to know why the beliefs of those coming against us is NOT the truth.

So how do we do that? We do it by understanding worldview concepts, and by using those concepts to understand our own faith and the faith of those who oppose us.

What is Worldview?

So just what is a worldview? The quick formal definition is that a worldview is the assumptions people make about the nature of reality. That is, it is a set of beliefs that define for an individual what they consider to be real vs. what they consider to be fantasy. Now that is an easy definition to quote, but the depth and significance of the definition needs to be pondered a bit for it to truly hit home in our lives.

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Worldview Resources

It is one of the primary purposes of **MarketFaith Ministries** to provide resources to help Christians understand the practical implications of worldview. You can find many free resources that will help you in your quest at <http://www.marketfaith.org>.

Interestingly, most people's worldview beliefs are assumed to the degree that they are totally unconscious. After all, if a person considers certain particular beliefs to be fantasy, it is not even worth the time to give deep thought to them at all. People consider their own worldview beliefs to be true – just because they are true.

For example, as a Christian, you believe in God. The idea that someone would say they don't believe in God seems rather senseless – a fantasy. It seems that way because your experience, at the most foundational level, has brought you to the place where you believe. You have met Christ and interact personally with God in your spiritual life. Many Christians reason that, "Yeah, they say they don't believe in God, but just wait until a serious crisis hits"

But here's the kicker, those Atheists have the same sense of assurance that God does *not* exist that you have that he *does*. They look at your belief in God as a fantasy. Very few have ever considered *why* they believe that way. It is just that, to them, the idea of God simply doesn't make sense.

So a worldview is a set of assumptions that people hold, generally at an unconscious level, that helps them organize their thoughts about what is real and what is fantasy.

How Do We Recognize a Worldview?

The next question relates to where a person's worldview comes from. And there are actually three different possibilities.

Circumstances

The first possibility relates to the environment a person was raised in. Every person has been raised by people who, themselves, held some

set of worldview beliefs. Those beliefs were simply assumed to be true, and they taught them to their children by word and by deed without even realizing they were doing so. A social environment just is what it is, and those raised in it just pick it up. It's never questioned because children don't know enough to question them.

Conversion

The second place a worldview can come from is by conversion. At some point in life, most people will come face-to-face with an opposing worldview. In many cases, the beliefs they were raised in are strong enough that the conflicting worldview beliefs are merely seen as fantasy – nonsensical.

But some people encountering those new beliefs are challenged by them – they somehow make sense. When that happens, it shakes them to the core, because if those new beliefs are true, that means their previous understanding of reality is a lie.

This is what happens when a person comes face-to-face with the realization that God is a real person that they can know in an objectively real personal relationship, and they invite Christ into their life. It is a conversion experience. It also sometimes happens the other way around. When a person who was raised in a Christian home is taught the Theory of Evolution in school, for instance, and it somehow ends up making more sense to them than the belief that God created life, they will convert to Atheism. The shock of the new belief is such that they change their understanding of reality and convert to believing a different narrative.

Choice

The third place a worldview belief can come from is choice. Since most people's worldview beliefs are completely unconscious, there is not a conscious choice to be made. But if a person comes to a place where they actually

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study worldview concepts and learn the various possibilities, it is then possible to analyze those possibilities and choose the one that seems to best match up with what they experience as reality. This is probably the least common way people come to their worldview beliefs because so few people actually ever study worldview concepts.

What Are the Implications of Thinking in Worldview Terms?

It is important to understand that grasping worldview concepts is not simply an academic exercise. There are very real and practical implications in these concepts that relate to real life. These implications not only affect our understanding, but also the way we think about our own, and other people's, beliefs, and the way we interact with other people. There are five primary areas where the practical implications of worldview knowledge come into play.

1. It Defines the Essential Elements of the Christian Faith

We are all aware that there is a lot of variety within the Christian faith. Sadly, this variety accounts for much of the division we see within the Christian community. The variety, in and of itself, is not necessarily a bad thing, but it becomes a problem when people who hold certain theological views are not willing to accept those who hold differing views.

At this point there is a certain distinction that needs to be made. Not all beliefs within the Christian faith are equal. There are certain beliefs that are essential and others that are not essential.

The essential ones actually define the outer boundaries of the faith itself. Those who hold to beliefs that are outside of the essentials are actually outside of the Christian faith. Those essential beliefs relate to what the Bible teaches about God, man, and salvation. We get at these beliefs by answering three questions:

1. Who is God?
2. What is man?
3. What is salvation and how do we achieve it?

The non-essential beliefs relate to other doctrines such as what one believes about baptism, predestination, eschatology (last things), and the like. Note, it is not that these other doctrines are not important. They actually are. But they are not important to the extent that they affect whether or not one is legitimately a Christian. A person can even have absolutely wrong beliefs about these non-essential things and still be within the family of believers.

Having a firm grasp on what the Bible teaches about God, man, and salvation provides Christians with the absolute essential core elements of the faith. This is the starting point for being able to use worldview knowledge in ways that strengthen our Christian faith.

2. It Defines the Essential Elements of Other Faith Systems

The essential beliefs that were referred to in the previous section also have an important part to play in our understanding of other, non-Christian, belief systems. In fact, every belief system in existence has some way that it answers the three essential questions about God, man, and salvation. The answer to these three questions based on the beliefs of any given belief system, defines it's essential core beliefs. Having that information allows us to understand other beliefs, and gives us a tool to analyze them for truth.

3. It Defines the Core of the Gospel Message

There is a third value for understanding a worldview paradigm when it comes to expressing our Christian faith out in the world. As it turns out, not only does knowing the biblical answers to the three essential world-

view questions help us understand the core essentials of our Christian faith, it also provides us with the information we need to share our faith. In fact, the biblical answers to the three questions comprise the Christian plan of salvation. We are sharing the gospel message when we share with a non-believer how the Bible answers those three questions.

4. It Can Be Used as a Means of Bible Study

Another value of understanding the worldview paradigm is that it helps us focus in on the essential elements of biblical faith as we read the Bible. There are a lot of topics that are addressed in the Bible, and it is possible to discern various doctrines from the biblical text as we read it. Proper biblical interpretation would have us search the entire Bible to see what it says on particular topics, and that gives us the whole counsel of Scripture on those topics. More importantly, as we study the Bible, if we read with a view to how particular passages and verses answer the three essential questions, we have a way of studying the Bible that keeps us focused on the essential core of the Bible's message.

5. It Can Be Used in Incursion Apologetics to Break down Non-biblical Beliefs

One other value in understanding the worldview paradigm is that it gives Christians the tools to stand strong against those who try to attack the Christian faith. These days, many people, particularly those who hold a naturalistic worldview, are not content to merely believe something different, they want to destroy Christians to the greatest degree possible. To do that, they use all kinds of arguments and tactics – from questioning the validity of the Bible's message, to condemning the beliefs and values of Christianity, to asserting that the Bible has been accurately preserved through the centuries, and others.

When people become antagonistic like that, it is generally not sufficient to merely answer their taunts. Rather, one must actually question the validity of the attack itself. The use of a worldview paradigm to understand the beliefs and weaknesses of an attacker is extremely valuable in pulling off that kind of response. When we know what other people believe and why what they believe is not true, we are in a position to make them justify their attack before being required to answer them. This approach also puts us in a position to express the truth of the gospel message and share a Christian witness to them.

What Does a Church Need to Do to Prepare its People? In these days, false beliefs are ubiquitous – that is, there are scores of different false beliefs that are prominent in the public square. So how can a church help its people deal with this issue – not only for helping them discern between true and false beliefs, but also help them become able to share an effective Christian witness in this complicated societal soup?

The key is to do what the Bible teaches in Ephesians 4:11-13 – to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We should not abandon the ministry that is already being done, but at the same time an increased emphasis must be placed on Christian discipleship efforts. And a special emphasis needs to be placed on biblical worldview training.

Make no mistake about it, this is much easier said than done. People get settled into their regular routines in all areas of life – including church life. But unless this new emphasis is intentionally implemented, Christians will continue falling further and further behind. We need to be equipped!

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