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What the Church is Missing

By Freddy Davis

It has been a while since I have actively trained in karate, but I did it for many years and advanced to become a 4th degree black belt. I recall an incident at our dojo one time when I came in to lead a class of brand new students. All of these were older elementary aged children.

One new student in particular had been to one class previously on a day when I was not present, and in that class a novice student was assigned to teach him his very first kata. (A kata is an individual training exercise that is practiced in karate and other martial arts.) The day I came in, I began working with this new student on the one kata that he had been introduced to in order to help him get it down more precisely. The novice student had taught this new person the basic moves of the kata, but this child's technique was quite sloppy (totally expected for a new student having been taught by another beginner), so I proceeded to work with him to clean it up.

Then a hilarious thing happened. As I corrected one particular move, this beginner stopped me and told me I was doing it wrong. After all, what does a 4th degree black belt know about the most basic kata that new students learn, right? Well, as it turned out, he had been taught an incorrect movement, but was convinced it was correct. He simply did not know any different. After all, he only knew what he knew.

Where the Church Stands

I do worldview training for churches and Christian organizations, and have the opportunity to share worldview knowledge with many different

groups. Most people that I end up teaching, though not all, have been Christians for a long time – some even many, many years. In spite of that, I have never trained a group where even close to a majority of the participants were already familiar with the worldview discipleship concepts I was teaching. In fact, most were not previously familiar with the concept at all.

This, also, is to be totally expected because until more recent times, understanding a worldview paradigm was not even necessary for most American Christians. It was something more appropriate for people involved in missionary work. However, we now live in a different day – one that is increasingly post-Christian. Now, everyday American Christians need to grasp these worldview concepts in order to effectively stand strong and express the truth of the gospel to non-believers. Without it, effective communication of faith concepts to people who hold non-Christian worldview beliefs is difficult to impossible.

It is a sad fact that most Christians, even those who are faithful in church and deeply love the Lord, simply are not equipped to deal with the large variety of non and anti biblical beliefs that currently dominate society. The discipleship training methods and traditions of most churches trace back to before the current explosion of different religious expressions in America. Even newer churches mostly operate based on traditions that have their roots in an America that was dominated by a biblical worldview – a worldview platform that is increasingly being erased from the public square. The result is that churches tend to be enclaves of beliefs and values that are quite different from the society that surrounds them.

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Of course, that's not a bad thing. The church actually should be preserving a biblical worldview and sharing it with the world, rather than being influenced by it. The problem, though, is that many of the methods and traditions that continue to exist in modern churches make it difficult to take our Christian beliefs outside of our church enclave. Most Christians continue to hold onto the notion that society is still dominated by Christian theistic beliefs when it is not. With that as a starting place, they continue using outreach methodologies that most non-believers simply don't grasp. And because of the persistence of the old paradigm within our discipleship training systems, the methods used to reach out into society have not changed to adapt to the current societal environment. While our Christian message never changes, the methods that must be used to effectively reach into a society that has radically been altered must be changed.

Where Society Stands

The worldview belief that now dominates American society is Naturalism – the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. This worldview system functions using an entirely different set of values than the Christian Theism that our nation was founded upon. Rather than the objective beliefs and values that support Christian theology, Naturalism's values are based on relativism – that is, there is no objective moral standard for society's beliefs, because no objective moral law giver is acknowledged to exist.

The methods necessary to share Christ in a relativistic environment are entirely different from the methods needed in an environment where objective moral beliefs are assumed to be true (the way it used to be in American society). Those who believe in naturalistic worldview be-

liefs simply don't get the concept of an objective Christian message, and Christians steeped in the objective moral foundation of Christian Theism don't get how to share their message to relativists. It is a serious dilemma. And the solution to the problem is found in understanding worldview concepts. Without that, churches and individual Christians will continue to flounder greatly as they attempt to take Christ to society.

It is not enough to recognize what is wrong, we must also understand "why" something is wrong and know how to effectively push back (and, in the process, share a witness for Christ). Faithful Christian churches teach the truth. However, most do not teach how to effectively communicate that truth to a society that operates on a different wavelength. It involves more than simply making a canned gospel presentation. If we keep on doing things "the way we have always done them," churches will continue to wither and die.

The church cannot accurately be characterized merely as a social organization. Its true essence is a spiritual family. As such, the focus of church activities must not be to merely satisfy the desires of the congregation. Rather, it should be to please God.

Liberal churches view the church almost entirely as a social organization, and they focus on promoting social priorities. And in our current relativistic environment, even many self-identified "evangelical" churches have shifted their focus more toward social outreach than gospel outreach. One of the main reasons for this is that they know how to extend a good works helping hand to express their love for Christ but don't know how to more directly confront the culture with the gospel message itself, so they end up defaulting to the easiest activity to pull off – which is often providing good works for the community. For those

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that have made that shift, good works have become the focus of their efforts, rather than sharing the good news of salvation based on a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Of course, the church, and individual Christians, ought to be doing good works. But good works must be kept in perspective. Based on the Christian gospel, good works are an expression of salvation, not its source. When salvation is redefined to focus on good works, the gospel message itself is compromised.

What We Are Missing

So, as the church, exactly what are we missing? How do we guard against falling prey to a works oriented approach to Christian ministry, and at the same time efficiently reach out and share the gospel to a world that does not grasp biblical concepts? It is done by the effective use of a discipleship training process. That being said, the process we create must be deliberately designed to equip believers with particular knowledge of how to do it and the skills to pull it off – and that process is different from the traditions that exist in most churches. So exactly what must that equipping process consist of?

1. An understanding of the core beliefs of the Christian faith and why they are true

There are many doctrines that can be derived from the Bible that help us in various parts of our spiritual development, and teaching those doctrines has been a part of discipleship training efforts for ages. However, rarely do churches make a distinction between core essential doctrines and all the rest.

There are three core doctrines that are key. These are the ones that actually define the parameters of the Christian faith itself. They consist of

the doctrines of God, man, and salvation. A person can't believe or share what they don't understand. With so many weird beliefs now swirling around in the societal environment, too many Christians are picking up unbiblical beliefs and incorporating them into their own belief system without even realizing they are corrupting their biblical faith. A sound knowledge of the core essential Christian beliefs is crucial, and Christians need to be solidly grounded in them.

2. An understanding of the core beliefs of the false faiths that dominate modern society and why they are not true

Modern American society is religiously pluralistic in a way that is unprecedented in the nation's history. If we wish to not be influenced by false beliefs, not only do we need to solidly know our own faith foundation, but also have at least a basic understanding of the false ones – and why they are not true. This gives us a means of comparing and contrasting our beliefs to false ones, and analyzing for truth.

3. An understanding of how to effectively speak the gospel message into society's false beliefs

People's religious faith is based on a worldview foundation that literally defines what they understand to be real vs. what they believe to be fantasy. Thus, if we attempt to speak the gospel message into the beliefs of someone who is not a Christian, they may understand our words, but they immediately evaluate what we are saying as fantasy. They will likely not even understand the meaning of the message we are sharing. Modern Christians must become equipped to share the gospel across these worldview barriers in a way that is understandable to non-believers. That means becoming familiar with worldview concepts. This is the way missionaries do their work.

4. An understanding of how to effectively do apologetics to share our faith

Effective Christian apologetics, in modern American society, must involve more than merely justifying our own Christian beliefs. Being able to do that is important, of course, but for the most part, that will be totally unacceptable to people who don't believe the Bible to begin with. We must also be equipped to make people who hold false beliefs defend their position. It is an understanding of worldview concepts that gives us the tools to pull that off.

What Has to Happen to Turn Things Around

Turning the societal situation around is going to be quite difficult. First it is difficult because society really doesn't want to change. That is just the nature of the one we live in now.

But there is also an element within the church that compounds the difficulty. That particular struggle, though, is not a problem because the knowledge necessary to do it is hard to master. In fact, it is not that hard at all. Rather, it is difficult because of the inertia of the old ways. Virtually every church has a "way that they do things," and change is hard. So just what kind of change will have to happen?

1. Understand that a new paradigm for discipleship training is necessary, and fully grasp what that involves.
2. Change in the mindset of church leaders (pastors and lay leaders) - A huge part of the difficulty in creating change lies in the fact that most leaders do not realize a new approach is even needed. They somehow have to come to that realization.
3. Change in the mindset of church members - Once the leadership is convinced that a new approach is necessary, figuring out a way to pull off a culture change in a setting where new ways are often resisted is a huge challenge. Leadership will definitely be tested on this one – both in their creativity and in their persistence.
4. Change in the church's focus - Once the church decides to move forward with enhanced discipleship training, a specific plan must be developed for implementation. A plan cannot work itself. This plan must have, at its center, a method for training people to understand a worldview paradigm.
5. Change in the church's programming - Finally, the plan must be implemented in real life. This may involve either simply adding the new focus, or it may require replacing some of the programming that already exists. This, also, can prove to be quite the challenge.

In spite of the difficulty of pulling it off, however, it can be done – but not without a deliberate plan and considerable effort. Let me know if you would like some guidance on how to pull this off in your church. We would be honored to help you think this through. The transformation of your community for Christ is at stake.

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