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American Churches Desperately Need In-Depth Discipleship Training

By Freddy Davis

So just how bad is the lack of understanding of Christian beliefs in America? Well, according to Christian pollster George Barna, way worse than you might imagine.

Barna polls diligently to get his finger on the pulse of American society, particularly as it relates to religious beliefs. Over the last several years, he has documented how currently only 68% of Americans even claim to be Christians. But that is not the worst of it. While 68% claim to be Christians, only 6% actually hold a biblical worldview. The implication of that is that even the huge majority of those who claim to be Christians do not hold beliefs that are fully consistent with what is taught in the Bible.

Recently, Barna broke this down state by state to see how all of this plays out around the country. In looking at the statistics, there are a couple of things that immediately jump out. First, just the sheer number of people who *don't* hold a biblical worldview is staggering. But more importantly, there is not a place in America where biblical worldview beliefs are strong.

I would never be one to actually judge how many people personally know Christ. There are, obviously, a lot of people who are Christians, but who have come to believe some things that do not correspond to what is taught in the Bible. God is the only one able to judge peoples' salvation, as only He can see their hearts. That said, the amount of ignorance of biblical beliefs, even among those who claim to be Christians, is staggering.

According to Barna's polling, the state with the highest percentage of people who hold a biblical worldview is Alabama – and there, it only rises to 12.6% of the population. On the other end of the spectrum is Rhode Island. They come in at a paltry .25%. (See the charts at the end of this article to see where the top and bottom 10 states fare.)

On an individual level, this should make every Christian take a deep look inside and evaluate where they fit. (Can

they clearly share their biblical worldview beliefs or not?) Odds are, most would not be able to do it – even those who self-identify as Christians. In fact, if someone were to ask you to identify your worldview beliefs, would you be able to do it?

This gets even scarier when thinking on a church level. Based on Barna's findings, a massive number of church members, even very faithful participants in church, do not hold a biblical worldview – or at the very least have hybridized their beliefs in such a way as to hold certain beliefs that do not correspond to the teachings of the Bible.

Why Worldview Understanding is Important

What these statistics show is that there is a **massive** need for Christians individually, and churches corporately, to get up to speed in this area. While most Christians never really think that deeply about this subject, not being clear about biblical worldview beliefs causes them to incorporate beliefs and act in ways that are contrary to God's will.

When we see people spouting off beliefs and acting in ways that seem so anti-Christian, it is tempting to think that they just have a different "opinion" than we do. But that is not accurate. A person's worldview actually expresses the way they view reality. So when you come across those people (either in person or even on the nightly news), they are not merely expressing a contrary opinion, they are expressing an entirely different way of understanding the structure of reality. In other words, their beliefs and actions seem like fantasy to you, and your beliefs come across as fantasy to them. Unless there is some way to bridge that gap, even basic communication is impossible.

So, if you are a Christian and would like to share Christ with someone who holds a worldview different from yours, it becomes quite difficult for them to understand

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your message unless you can figure out a way to build a conceptual bridge from your Christian beliefs to their non-Christian beliefs.

Building a Worldview Bridge is Difficult Until ...

Building a conceptual bridge from one worldview to another can certainly be difficult – that is until you know how to do it. Once you have that knowledge, everything falls into place nicely.

In a nutshell, creating that bridge is done by sharing with the person you are trying to communicate with a comparison of their and your worldview beliefs. Once they are able to see the beliefs side by side, it becomes immediately clear where the differences are and what is necessary to bridge the communication gap.

What Has to Be Communicated?

First, let's define a worldview. It is the assumptions people make about the nature of reality. This means simply that they are beliefs that people assume to be true to the extent that they cannot imagine that other people could reasonably believe anything else.

Well, it's one thing to know a definition, but how do we actually get at a person's worldview beliefs? It's not difficult at all, really. All you have to do is answer three simple questions based on a person's authority source (the ultimate source of their beliefs). That ultimate authority source will be either human reason, history and tradition, human experience, or revelation. The three questions are:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is the ultimate a person can get out of this life?

How Christians Answer the Three Worldview Questions

1. Ultimate reality exists in the way it is expressed in the Bible.
2. Human beings are persons made in the image of God, but fallen.
3. Life's ultimate is to know a personal relationship with God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

How Naturalists Answer the Three Worldview Questions

1. Ultimate reality consists only of the natural universe operating by natural laws.
2. Human beings are naturally evolved animal creatures.
3. Life's ultimate is survival and personal fulfillment.

How Animists Answer the Three Worldview Questions

1. Ultimate reality consists of one reality divided into spirit and physical parts that interact with each other in a symbiotic relationship.
2. Human beings are physical beings that have a spiritual core.
3. Life's ultimate is to keep the gods/spirits happy so they won't cause bad to happen.

How Far Eastern Pantheists Answer the Three Worldview Questions

1. Ultimate reality is the transcendent, impersonal, immaterial life force.
2. Human beings are illusory material expressions of the life force that have been reincarnated to the human level based on the process of karma.
3. Life's ultimate is to progress through successive lives and ultimately escape the suffering of material reality by re-joining the transcendent life force.

How Non-Christian Theists Answer the Three Worldview Questions

1. Ultimate reality is defined by the authority source of a non-Christian Theist's particular belief system.
2. Human beings are creatures created by the God of the particular belief system they acknowledge to be true.
3. Life's ultimate is defined by the authority source of the belief system a non-Christian Theist acknowledges to be true.

Putting All of this Together

The descriptions above are, by necessity, only skeleton descriptions of the differences between different worldview beliefs. To understand the full impact of these differences, a deeper study needs to be engaged. Along with that, an understanding of the relationship between worldview systems and beliefs systems, and a grasp of the fact that there are numerous belief systems that

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Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:
info@marketfaith.org

Phone: 850-383-9756

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fit within each worldview category are other key concepts that need to be understood.

The explanations shared above of how the different worldviews answer the essential worldview questions, though, is enough to show how radically different the various worldview possibilities are. They also give a basis for how two different worldview systems can be compared and contrasted side by side to help a person grasp how their beliefs differ from biblical beliefs. This process creates a bridge for sharing the gospel across worldview barriers that is extremely difficult without that cross-worldview tool.

Not Just for the Professionals

Many Christians, even regular church attenders, are content to allow the Christian professionals to carry the responsibility of sharing the gospel message with the world – pastors, missionaries, church staff members, evangelists, seminary professors, etc. They are the ones, after all, who have been trained to do that sort of thing, right?

But the Bible is quite clear that carrying the gospel out into the world is the responsibility of every Christian. And the skill set for doing that is found in worldview literacy.

Honestly, though, worldview literacy is not something that is a part of the tradition of most American churches. Traditionally, that kind of training was limited to missionaries who were preparing to go to other countries that are dominated by some non-Christian worldview. In past times, it was not really needed in American society.

But American society has radically changed. Whereas it used to be dominated by Christian worldview beliefs, Naturalism is now the worldview system that dominates virtually every institution of modern society. In addition to that, over the last several decades, massive immigration has brought in people from all of the other worldview categories. It used to be that American Christians could simply share the simple gospel message and people understood what they were talking about.

Now, in many cases, before it is even possible to cross that gospel bridge, we must also cross the worldview bridge.

It is at this point where churches need to up their Christian discipleship game. And it is a desperate need. Faithful Christians need the tools to effectively share the gospel in the societal environment that exists in modern society, and most churches are not providing that. In fact, most don't even realize what tools need to be provided.

Well, the need definitely exists for worldview tools to be accessed by every Christian. It is beyond time for Christian leaders in churches to provide a systematic means for their people to get this kind of discipleship training.

Top Ten States in Christian Worldview Literacy

State % Holding a Biblical Worldview

1. Alabama	12.6
2. Mississippi	12.5
3. South Carolina	9.8
4. Arkansas	9.0
5. Montana	8.0
6. Virginia	7.1
7. Idaho	7.0
T-8. Oklahoma	6.7
T-8. Tennessee	6.7
10. North Carolina	6.3

Bottom Ten States in Christian Worldview Literacy

State % Holding a Biblical Worldview

41. New York	3.2
42. Louisiana	2.8
43. New Hampshire	2.6
44. New Mexico	2.2
45. Connecticut	1.9
T-46. Massachusetts	1.8
T-46. New Jersey	1.8
48. Nebraska	1.5
49. Maine	1.1
50. Rhode Island	Less than .25

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