

Chapter 1

WORLDVIEW

A worldview is a set of mostly unconscious assumptions that people hold about reality.

It was the first session of a seminar I was holding in my local church. I began expressing my belief in a number of basic teachings from the Bible: there is an omnipotent God, a devil; angels, and demons; the spiritual world can and does impact people's physical health; Christ can and does heal people today. At the end of the session, a lady who identified herself as a nurse expressed dismay at the content of my teaching. A summary and paraphrase of what I understood her to say was, "I have attended church most of my life, and I have never heard of some of the things you talked about. I can't believe that you expect us to take all of these things seriously, much less literally!"

WESTERN SECULAR WORLDVIEW

Many people assume and rarely question the view that the natural universe is understandable scientifically. They try to understand and describe the causes of natural phenomena:

- the cosmos
- sickness and health
- life and death
- the weather / earthquakes / natural disasters
- human existence
- the march of human history

The Western worldview is that immutable laws of nature define man's existence; consequently, many citizens believe that the universe is predictable and understandable. Some other cultures, represented historically by the Greeks with their capricious gods and goddesses, contradictorily believe that the universe is unpredictable.

A worldview is a cultural philosophy about reality, and a person is born into a cultural environment pervaded by a particular worldview just as a fish is born in water. The Western worldview pervades our education, media, government, entertainment, and folk wisdom. When a worldview is not questioned, it is because it is not perceived, as people in the Middle Ages rarely thought to question the cultural assumption that the earth was the center of the universe.

The Biblical worldview is vastly different from the Western and every other worldview. Christians live in a society where the prevailing worldview bombards them incessantly and where the Biblical worldview is ridiculed and not taken seriously. It appears that many Christians, for example, Christian students who attend schools where their faith is scoffed at, are intimidated and therefore attempt to reconcile the two contrasting worldviews. Sometimes they do this by "cutting and pasting" certain parts of the Western worldview into their Christian belief system. They might try to incorporate the doctrine of evolution into

the Biblical creation story, or they might decide that the miracle stories in the Bible are meant to be taken figuratively but not literally.

Once again, a worldview is the set of conscious and unconscious assumptions a culture holds about reality. As assumptions, they are ultimately unprovable. I have compiled a few contradictory statements that demonstrate the difference between the Western secular worldview and the Biblical worldview:

| WESTERN SECULAR WORLDVIEW | BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW |
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| Materialism: The material world is the only reality. Rationalism: Reason is the only guide to truth. Revelation and the supernatural are rejected. | God/devil, heaven/hell, angels/demons are all Spiritual realities. Miracles (healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water) happen as a result of the power of God. |
| Evolution: The world formed spontaneously by natural forces. | Creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." ¹ |
| Atheism: There is no God. | "There is ONE God..." ² Satan said to Eve, |
| New Ageism: Man is a god or is becoming a god. | "...you will become like God." ³ |
| Existence (man) has no purpose. | "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." ⁴ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁵ |
| Secular Humanism: Man is the crowning achievement of an impersonal world, and each man decides for himself what is right or wrong. | The universe is not impersonal, it was created by a loving God, "God is love." ⁶ God requires us to obey His commandments, ⁷ which He gave us for our own good, not because He is a tyrant. |

It is quite a stretch to harmonize these two worldviews.

Our culture has rejected the transcendent worldview, things outside the limit of ordinary experience (God, heaven, hell, afterlife, judgment). A large part of the Western church has accepted certain tenets of the Western secular worldview such as the ideas that the universe formed spontaneously by natural processes and that human dignity and tolerance requires that persons decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Man, thereby "demythologizes" these and various other points in order to harmonize with "reality". By the same token, they tend to accept the role of the supernatural on earth as it occurred in biblical times while conveniently disputing the possibility of the same thing happening on earth today. This portion of the church has difficulty accepting supernatural reality such as:

- The Holy Spirit
- Angels

- Demons
- Signs and wonders
- Gifts of the Spirit (miracles, healing, tongues)
- Dreams and visions

The great revelation is that life is not about us, it is about Him; about Christ. He is God.⁸ He was the agent of creation,⁹ He is the Savior ("Jesus" means "Savior" in the Hebrew language) and He is King ("Christ" means "anointed one" or "King"). All things will be summed up in Him, and, mystery of mystery, He loves us!

Before people experience Christ in their lives, the Bible appears to be a strange antiquated book full of mythology, and Christians (true believers) seem just as strange. Unbelievers inevitably look down on believers as being simple, naive, intellectually suspect, hypocritical, out of touch with reality (worldview), narrow-minded in their view of God, unloving and unscientific in their view of sin and of man, etcetera.

To the Christian, unbelievers appear to be blind. "Why can't you see?" And of course the Bible, perceived in an entirely different way, answers that question: "The god of this age (worldview) has blinded the minds of those who don't believe so that they cannot see reality" (Paraphrase).¹⁰

The Bible says that our destiny is determined as we decide about Christ. We are in the position of Pilate who in judging Christ passed judgment on himself, and he could not wash his hands and opt out of deciding. Jesus did not leave us that option either. He said "He who is not for me is against me."¹¹ Jesus was either deceived and an evil man who thought he was God, or He was and is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to God except through Him.¹²

Each of us must either vote with the crowd who said, "Crucify Him!" or bow down and worship Him.

What is real?

WORLDVIEW AND A HARD HEART

As previously stated, a worldview is a set of assumptions which people hold about reality. It is a philosophy about reality which is ultimately unprovable. Why does the Western worldview regard the idea that God created all things as anti-intellectual? (Someone said that we have only two options: "In the beginning God" or "Once upon a time.") Much of the scientific speculation about the beginning is in the realm of fairy tale. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "(God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."(NIV) Why is it considered anti-intellectual to believe that human life has a purpose? Or that there is good and evil, right and wrong? An example is the professor who stated forcefully, "There are no absolutes!" and the student who responded to him by saying, "Are you absolutely sure?"

In our society, men who believe that they can talk with God are considered unbalanced. Granted, there are a lot of religious nuts around, but Psalms 94:9 asks, "*Does he who implanted the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?*"(NIV) The book of Mark records the occasion when the disciples were amazed and disconcerted to see Jesus walking on the sea,¹³ and then says that their reaction was "*because their hearts were hardened*". Think about that. We who are believers can have hard hearts that prevent us from seeing and understanding God at work around us. I'll give you an example:

A woman went to her pastor and described her conversion experience. She said that one evening she entered her house and sensed a presence that frightened her. She entered her bedroom and heard a voice, "Rosalee." No one was there. She heard the voice again, "Rosalee." She said, "Who is it? Lord?" And the voice said, "Yes, Rosalee, it's time for you to know me." She fell on her knees and received Christ as her Savior. When she recounted this story to her pastor he thought she was demented. She was hearing voices. So he took her through the Bible steps of salvation to insure that she was *really* saved. She left that meeting very hurt and confused.

The pastor's worldview about how God speaks to people today controlled how he interpreted her experience.

Here is another example: Doctors told a hospitalized woman and her husband that she would not live through the night. The husband called the church elders and asked them to come and anoint her with oil and pray for her. They came very reluctantly, anointed her with oil, and prayed. The next day she walked out of the hospital, healed. The doctors said that it was a miracle. The elders never told the congregation what happened. They weren't excited about it nor did they start praying for the sick in their church. When the woman and her husband started telling people in the church how God had healed her, they went to her and asked her either to be quiet about that experience or to leave the church.

Why? The theology and worldview of the elders did not allow them to acknowledge that God might function in such a way today. Their reaction to the woman's healing is not surprising. When Jesus healed the blind and paralyzed and even raised Lazarus from the dead it threatened and enraged the Pharisees because their hearts were hard.¹⁴ Many Scriptural experiences, (healings, miracles, prophesies, speaking in tongues, visions) are controversial with many Christians today because they are not rational experiences. The problem, I believe, is two-fold: their worldview is threatened, and their hearts are hardened.¹⁵

I am not suggesting that people should be gullible or turn off their minds. We are told to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength.¹⁶ A man once wrote the following to John Wesley: "God told me to tell you He don't need your book learning." Wesley responded, "While God did not tell me, I tell you on my own account that He doesn't need your ignorance either." It is important to remember that frauds and charlatans exist and that not every supernatural experience is from God. Jesus even warned about false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount.

Having said that, it is extremely dangerous to ascribe the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil. That may indicate a rock-hard heart and be the "unforgivable sin" cited in Mark 3:20-30. It is also extremely dangerous to refuse to be touched or moved by a God-given healing or miracle. Such acts of God are called "signs and wonders" in Scripture, and they are gifts of God to soften men's hearts and turn them

toward Him. Remember that God desires to turn our hearts, but He will never violate our free will. When Jesus' home town Capernaum ignored His miracles, He said they would be judged more severely than Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁷

When I was a backslidden denominational pastor, God performed a healing miracle before my eyes. A healing and physical miracle took place on a bed-ridden woman as several people prayed for her. My heart melted and I instantly repented. Thanks be to God! But neither the woman nor her husband who was also in the room were inwardly moved by God's merciful healing miracle. They were as cold and resistant toward God after the healing as they were before. Their hearts were hard. I have seen God heal many people as a result of prayer since that time. Most were thankful and moved to deepen their walk with God. Some had hard hearts. It was not a matter of intellect but a matter of the heart. They knew God had touched them, although some of them denied that God had anything to do with it. To believe in God is to bow the knee to Him. It is to submit your will to His will, it is to humble yourself, and it is to admit that you are a sinner who needs a Savior. It is to turn over the reins of life to Him. I believe that worldview for many people is an intellectually acceptable defense against the claims and love of God.

I'm suggesting that the problem men have with the Biblical worldview is not primarily a problem of the intellect but of the heart. A hard heart inclines us toward a worldview that excludes the supernatural and that excludes the God of the Bible, the God who is the ultimate Sovereign over the earth and created all things, the God who is personally and lovingly involved in our lives.

ENDNOTES

1. Genesis 1:1
2. 1 Timothy 2:5
3. Genesis 3:5
4. Ecclesiastes 12:13
5. Matthew 22:37-39
6. 1 John 4:8
7. 1 Corinthians 7:19
8. John 1:1, Hebrews 1:8
9. 1 John 1:2, Colossians 1:16
10. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4
11. Matthew 12:30
12. John 14:6
13. Mark 6:45-52
14. John 11 and 12
15. Mark 8:17, Romans 2:5, Hebrews 3:13
16. Mark 12:30
17. Matthew 11:23

