
Seeing the World from God's Perspective

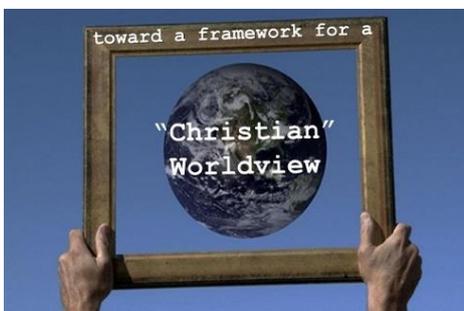
11 Christian World View as a Framework for Personal Belief and Practice

World Views and the Great Issues of Life

Our world view informs how we address the great questions of life by bringing them under the lens of biblically informed thinking.

This week we consider how a Christian world view helps shape how we look at everything. We:

- discuss how a Christian World View provides a warrant for belief in action
- identify a number of false views that carry the name “Christian”;
- consider the broad scope and inclusiveness of faith in action (are there limits?); and
- ask how we can begin to experience the kind of inner transformation to make it possible.



The Bible provides a warrant for Christian belief in action. Rather than adopting our cultures' standards we can live by a Biblical view of issues such as:

- creation, care for the earth and the environment
- ethnic diversity (Christianity is arguably the most culturally diverse of all the world's religious systems)
- world order - our prayer is for the Kingdom of God to come, for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10)
- moral and ethical issues
 - moral ambiguity affects the church, often as much as the non-Christian community, including in the areas of:
 - ⇒ increased level of marriage collapse and divorce
 - ⇒ acceptance of homosexuality and same sex marriages in the church, in ministry
 - ⇒ radical forms of feminism
 - ⇒ sexual abuse by clergy
 - ⇒ recognition of de facto marriages
 - ⇒ acceptance/support for abortion and euthanasia
 - ⇒ support for adoption by same-sex couples
 - ⇒ the definition of “family”
 - ⇒ debates over the justness of war, capital punishment

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

- human rights, freedom and equality
- the nature and relevance of contemporary church
- the nature of evangelical concern in its relation to society at large
- Christian witness to the world
- work, employment and industrial relations
- economic modelling, wealth distribution and global poverty
- bio-engineering and stem cell research

That is easier said than done, as the traditional church struggles to retain its place and forms in the West and emerging movements undercut its witness.

False "Christian" world views

False Christian world views exist on a number of levels.

(i) Cults - false teaching

Cults such as Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism and Scientology teach that they are "the only true church", with the only genuine revelation ("I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam", Joseph Smith). They reject mainstream Christianity.

"For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough." (2 Corinthians 11:4)

While the mainstream cults are characterised by beliefs and traditions that are contrary to Biblical revelation, and make them obvious, it is also important to remember that even great truths, if over-emphasised, taken out of context or elevated above the centrality of the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ, can become cultish.



(ii) Commercialised Christianity

Christianity is perceived by many of its critics as having lost touch with reality. It is seen as abstract and theoretical. Theology sometimes comes across as too academic. Some Christians and churches have eclectic cultures. In order to appeal, faith can be over-commercialised.

Look at the religious paraphernalia that has grown up around Jesus' name:

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

- bookmarks made from Lebanon Cedar or olive wood from the Garden of Gethsemane or the Mount of Olives
- “Holy Water” from the Jordan River, “where Jesus was baptised” (featuring an artist’s impression of the Holy Spirit descending from heaven, on the side of the box)
- battery operated angels that glow in the dark and sing “Holy, Holy, Holy”
- herbs from the Holy Land - “like those Mary would have used in her cooking”
- “Biblical scents” exuding “the smells that greeted Jesus in the Garden”
- Dead Sea bath salts “to give you a heavenly lift”
- cups with inspirational sayings lifted from the Bible or religious poetry
- Lily of the Valley soap
- Rose of Sharon oil for anointing the sick, said to be the most efficacious
- tea bags with Bible verses on the labels, “for that special moment”
- Bible verse candy canes; and “faith” jelly beans
- ceramic busts of popes and other religious leaders



McDonalds is well known for mass producing fast food in a generic way, often aimed at younger people, attracting children because of give-aways (gimmicks) amid a splash of colourful advertising. Customers landing in any city in the world where McDonalds has outlets can generally predict what the menu will look like, what the food and coffee will taste like, the physical lay-out and the broad price range.

There are temptations in the West for churches to adopt the McDonalds corporatized, or franchise, approach. Why have individuality and too much choice when the shape and content of the burger can be prescribed and all you need to do is smile and offer a fast food approach to spirituality. Just don't hang around waiting for depth.

Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostals all run the risk of doing the same thing, as do movements (“streams”) such as Hillsong, Willow Creek, Vineyard and Redeemer.

On the other hand, globalisation has resulted in proliferation of “glocal” models people feel comfortable with. Visit your brand name and style in capital cities across the globe.

(iii) Secularised Christianity

The church in the West is declining in a secular (“disestablished”) environment. Many Christians are highjacked by secular thinking, often because they do not know what they really believe, or why; others “dumb down” Christianity so as to avoid rejection of what they hold to be true by an unbelieving or hostile society. Examples:

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Secularised Answer</u>	<u>Christian Answer</u>
What if the desires of man conflict with the law of God?	Do what makes sense	Follow the law of God
How do I get to heaven?	Be a good person	Accept salvation offered by Jesus
What is my purpose in life?	Make the world better	Know and love God
What does God want me to do?	Help my fellow man and love my neighbour	Love God with all my heart and love my neighbour as myself
How should I live?	As reason dictates	As God commands
How do I decide what is right?	Does it help mankind?	Does God command it?
What is sin?		
Why should I do what is right?	Hurting others	Disobeying God
	It is rational	Because God commands it
Why should I forgive?		Because God commands it
	So others forgive me	
What should I pray?		To understand God's will
What if I disagree with a commandment?	To get good things I want	Accept that I am not God and obey the commandment
	See if it is relevant to my life.	
How is Christianity different from other faiths?		Jesus Christ is my Saviour
	It is essentially the same	Accepting Christ as Lord
What makes one a good Christian?	Helping others	
		Love the Lord my God
What is the greatest moral law?	Love my neighbour	
		Bring him to Jesus Christ
How can I best help my neighbour?	Give material help	
		To show him God's love
Why should I help my neighbour?	Because he is a fellow human	

When people give up on church, they don't give up on spirituality. Instead, they shop around for alternatives. They walk away from rigid or sterile tradition and shallow spirituality because

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

tradition alone doesn't work beyond the placebo level if rigor mortis has set in, but they remain spiritual beings, made in the image of God, with ongoing spiritual needs. What the world needs, and Christians can be channels to deliver, is the transformative power of God.



(iv) Antinomian Christianity - Latin *anti* = against, Greek *nomos* = law.

Belief that, under the Gospel of grace the Biblical or moral law are not an obligation because faith alone saves. "We are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:15, cf Matthew 10:4). It is true that works do not save us, but antinomianism as a theology leads to excuses to keep on sinning. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1, 2).

Christians are not bound by "laws", but by a higher spiritual law, which is geared at holiness - this is one of the underlying messages of Romans.

- *"cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."*
- *"costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

(The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1937)

(v) Legalistic Theology

Legalism = strict adherence to laws, doctrines or prescriptions, observance of "the letter" rather than the spirit. The doctrine (or inference) that salvation is gained through good works. The judging of conduct in terms of adherence to laws.



Theologically, legalism is not new. Think of the Pharisees who, according to Christ, "strained out gnats and swallowed camels" (Matthew 23:24). They majored on minors. To the legalist, there

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

is no such thing as a “minor” (even if it has no Biblical foundation). Jesus spoke of the weightier things of the Law (Matthew 23:23). To the legalist, all issues are equally weighty. Legalism demands acceptance of everything the Church has ever dogmatized. Doctrinally, it is opposed to grace.

Legalists focus on where all the other Christians have “gone wrong”. The more legalistic a person becomes and the more he or she gets into theological controversy, the more corrupt their ability to treat others with grace and humility becomes.

“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” (Colossians 2:20-22)

Legalists may appear to be righteous and spiritual, but legalism ultimately fails to accomplish God's purposes because it is an outward performance instead of the result of an inward change.

“Legalism is looking at something besides Jesus Christ in order to be acceptable and clean before God “ (Timothy Keller).

(vi) Political Theology

Churches differ as to how to approach the topic of the “last days”, how to interpret the books of Daniel and Revelation and how to position themselves in post renaissance, post Industrial Revolution Western society. Many American movements and churches (eg Moral Majority; the so-called Religious Right; Christian Zionism), focus their interpretation of the world and eschatology on the role of America and her allies as “God's agents” in world affairs, theocracy and a biased view of modern history.

In doing so, they alienate communities/ paradigms, which other Christians believe (and live in).



(vii) Liberal Theology

We considered the implications of “liberal” Christianity, in a previous lesson.

Christian leaders need to have a Biblical theology and know how to operationalize it. A Christian world view demands that theology be “Christocentric”, ie all about Christ.

What shape will a reinvented church have? What ideas will predominate? What model are we trying to achieve? How much of the past should be carried forward? How can we evangelize

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

modern cities? What is the future of the church as we know it? What is the future role of parachurch organisations?

Practices that worked well fifty (or even twenty) years ago may not do so any longer; some are timeless and will work in practically any generation and culture. But the message does not change.

The church of the future must employ culturally sensitive evangelism, without being seduced to conform. Otherwise, natural processes will increasingly lead to the acceptance and validation of extra-Biblical offshoots such as Christian feminism, Christian gay groups, atheistic philosophies in Christian schools, removing Christ from Christmas and Easter celebrations and a host of similar developments in respectable ecclesial circles.

(viii) "Super-Spiritual" Theology

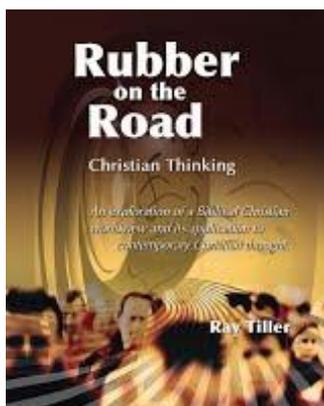
The inclusion of this topic may surprise, even offend, some believers; however, just as anything less than Christ is not Christian, anything more than Christ may be equally mistaken.

Super-spiritual Christians risk bypassing the obvious and building their lives on extra-Biblical interpretations, ranging from poor exegesis, neo-orthodoxies, or flights of fancy. Their views sometimes create barriers between them and those who are spiritually "inferior". In defining our world view as followers of Christ we should never lose the simplicity of the Gospel. Anything stemming from tradition that takes the supreme place of Christ can end up becoming false.

The Biblical Christian life is a spiritual experience: Christians pray, walk by faith, experience revelation, hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and exercise gifts supernaturally imparted by Him, experience divine guidance and have an eternal hope, in a heavenly home. Super-spirituality, on the other hand, is characterised by exclusiveness and pride that are redolent of the NT Gnostics and their insider "knowledge". Let us pray, walk by faith (not by sight) and have a relationship with the living God who is "there", but remain grounded in truth. Just as it is hard to be objective when we are subjectively involved, our world view must reflect the objectivity of God's Word and the broader Body of Christ.

Christian World View as a System and Foundation for Personal Belief

Faith in action (as distinct from denominational alignment) is "where the rubber hits the road".



Seeing the World from God's Perspective

Ray Tiller ("Rubber on the Road: Christian Thinking - An exploration of a Biblical Christian worldview and its application to contemporary Christian thought", 2012) approaches a Christian world view in terms of facilitating the doing of God's will on earth.

Tiller writes for Christian teachers and leaders who want to develop their ability to apply their faith and knowledge of the Bible in life to form a comprehensive and consistent Christian worldview.

The book applies a Christian worldview to inform thinking about a broad range of practical issues of life and community, starting out with a Biblical Christian hermeneutic, looking at philosophy and logic from Christian truths, and applying a Biblical view to modern living and value systems. Much of the book is dedicated to examining a series of 33 "statements" (a "curriculum framework for teachers and students) about contemporary issues.

Translating Christian belief into action.

"Hermeneutics" (the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts, by understanding context) are important for understanding a Christian world view? Jesus Christ lived on earth in defined space and time. He was a Jewish boy/man, in a male dominated traditional culture, in a proud society that God had once chosen but apparently discarded, in a remote outpost of an aggressive superpower, in a small town, where life was short, poverty, sickness, demon possession, illiteracy were high; he wanted to change the world and asked everyone to see things the way he saw them (even though some of the best minds were against him), and change their thinking and lives completely, to match his totally.

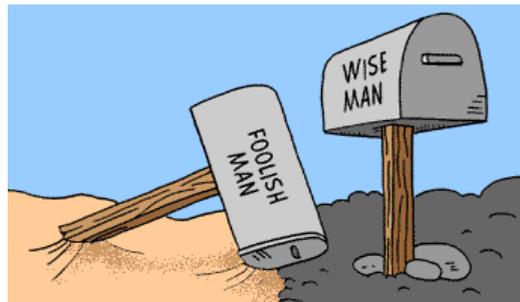
Living Christianly in the modern world makes a number of important assumptions:

- The believer who seeks to live as Christ accepts the validity of the Biblical record and standards as authoritative and normative for his or her life.
 - The Bible is the "last court of appeal" when judging what is true or not true; it sets our moral and ethical standards.
 - Obedience is not optional for authentic Christians, but obedience must come out of relationship with God, not as formulae.
- The Bible applies to every generation and culture.
 - This is because its authority lies in God, not the storyline or writers
 - In many ways the issues are just the same. In every age, what faces us has, more or less, thrown up the same things. Arguably our age is more complex, but strip away peripherals and we are just the same
- Biblical truth and way of life can be practiced in real life
 - This is because, unlike book-based religious systems, in Christianity the "Word" became flesh; the Bible is the inspired record, but Jesus lived it; we follow Him, not commandments, precepts or prohibitions for their own sake. Jesus said that the Scriptures are about Him.
- Integrating faith, learning, and living are essential in the development of the "modern world Christian". We are part of God's plan, God's masterpiece, because of Christ, not because of anything we have done (Jeremiah 9:23, 24). He gives us power to live for live for Him.

The teachings and person of Jesus Christ underpin any Biblical world view, and are absolutely essential for our lives.

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” (Matthew 7:26-29)



It is clear from this well-known conclusion of Jesus' so-called Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) that every life will experience storms, and that whether we stand or fall will be a direct result of whether or not His words and eternal truth are our foundation, the basis of our belief, thinking and actions, our planning, values and standards, who we are inside as well as whom we project to the world.

Looking at the world through the eyes of Christ (Ephesians 1:18-23) and approaching daily life as though walking “in His shoes” is foundational for:

- marriage, husband/wife relationships (1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:7)
- correct treatment of one's peers, members of the opposite sex and older people (1 Timothy 5:1-16)
- parenthood, modelling, discipline, sacrifice (Ephesians 6:1-4; Titus 2:1-10)
- keeping the family together (Psalm 127:1)
- being a Christian boss or employee (Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23)
- living in an ethnically diverse society (Acts 17:26; Galatians 3:26, 28; Colossians 3:11)
- looking out for the poor (Proverbs 31:8, 9; 1 John 3:17)
- being a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9)
- working (Genesis 2; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, 5:14)
- paying taxes (Romans 13:5-7)
- defending human dignity and rights (Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; Malachi 6:8)
- using money, acquiring and using possessions, being good stewards of resources (there are over 700 references to money in the Bible)
- understanding our true identity (our value does not abide in our wealth or power, Luke 12:15, but in the eyes of God)
- looking after the environment (Psalm 24:1)
- thinking about the future - we have confidence (2 Timothy 1:12) and an eternal hope (Titus 1:2); this world and everything in it is transitory; all will pass away, but we will be with one another and with Christ for ever.

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

This is all solid teaching but radical thinking. In some ways texts such as “the Lord is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5) might be metaphors but they are very relevant to the way we see the world and how we live in it, and how we see the bigger picture stretching into a real eternity.

*“Christianity is largely responsible for the way our society is organized and for the way we currently live. So extensive is the Christian contribution to our laws, our economics, our politics, our arts, our calendar, our holidays, and our moral and cultural priorities that historian J. M. Roberts writes in *The Triumph of the West*, ‘We could none of us today be what we are if a handful of Jews nearly two thousand years ago had not believed that they had known a great teacher, seen him crucified, dead, and buried, and then rise again.’ “ (What’s So Great about Christianity by Dinesh D’Souza.)*

Seen against the background of the big issues discussed at the beginning of this lesson, a Christian world view in action can sometimes lead to clashes, but unquestionably involve change. Such change must begin in the heart of the individual Christian believer, following him. When Jesus calls you, he expects you to begin thinking like him.

False Christian views will simply not “cut it”. Our credo is, “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

What brings about change?

- Not a list of faith systems and their credos displayed side by side for comparative purposes, like fruit in a supermarket - even though it *is* instructive to know and understand the facts (1 Peter 3:15).
- Not a statement of doctrinal beliefs, like a library catalogue - as important as a clearly defined and articulated systematic theology is (1 Timothy 2:15).
- Not a code of “dos” and “don’ts” or set responses to ethical issues - as vital as knowing how we ought to live may be (1 Peter 3:15).

None of these changes our learned behaviours or responses to external stimuli.

Real and lasting transformation is the work of God.

“Let the word [spoken by] Christ (the Messiah) have its home [in your hearts and minds] and dwell in you in [all its] richness, as you teach and admonish and train one another in all insight and intelligence and wisdom [in spiritual things, and as you sing] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to God with [His] grace in your hearts.” (Colossians 3:16 Amplified)



Seeing the World from God's Perspective

Thinking Christianly - a Framework

<i>If I have a Christian world view of...</i>	<i>I will....</i>
God's existence	
God's greatness and creative power	
God's holiness	
God's faithfulness	
God's authority over the nations	
God's presence in our lives	
God's grace	
God's absolute knowledge of the future	
Our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit	
God's infinite love for all people, regardless of race or culture	
God's love and interest in me, as someone made in His image	
The church as the Body of Christ	
The uniqueness of every individual, in a complex world	
The universality of sin	
The weakness of the human will	
The impact of sin in people's lives	
Christ's substitutionary death	
Our sins forgiven, unconditionally	
God's love for our enemies	
Our potential as born again believers	
The power of prayer	

Seeing the World from God's Perspective

Sexuality	
The sanctity of human life	
The sanctity of marriage	
Acquiring, owning and using possessions	
Work, employment, industrial relations	
The earth and environment	
The transience of human life	
God's love for the poor, disabled, homeless, refugee, unemployed, chronically ill	
Final judgement/salvation	
The end of Satan	