

A Biblical Worldview

SESSION 1

In the 16th century when William Wilberforce (born 24th Aug 1759) was 25 years old and as a young British politician he experienced a “*Great Change.*” He heard the gospel, responded in faith, and was born again.

According to Christian essayist Os Guinness at first WW wanted to quit his job in politics and enter full time ministry as a pastor. “William thinks that spiritual affairs are far more important than secular affairs such as politics,” explains Guinness.

Fortunately, John Newton the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace” a pastor and before his conversion to Christianity a slave trader, encouraged WW to pray carefully about this decision. Newton wrote to William saying, “*the Lord has raised him up for the good of the nation.*”

After much prayer and thought WW agreed and remained in politics as a committed evangelical member of the British Parliament. Shortly after this on Sunday, 28th October, 1787, WW recorded in his journal the vocation that he felt God had given him, “*God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the Suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners.*” (Reformation of Manners founded in 1691 aims for the suppression of vice, profanity and immorality.

“So enormous, so dreadful”, he later told the British House of Commons, “so irremediable did the Slave Trade’s wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for Abolition. Let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had affected its abolition.

In 17th century England, ‘manners means morals.’ William carried on the work through a society he founded called, ‘Society for the Suppression of Vice.’)

And he did not rest. At the time of WW’s conversion and calling the African Slave Trade formed a cornerstone of the British economy. Only a few people thought of it as wrong or evil. Powerful vested interests viciously opposed WW, as did a number of British celebrities and most of the royal family.

When WW presented his first bill to abolish the slave trade in 1791 it was easily defeated 163 votes to 88. But WW refused to be beaten. WW continued to press for the abolition of the slave trade, and eventually for full freedom of all slaves.

WW died on 29th July 1833 at the age of 73. One month later, the Parliament passed the Abolition of Slavery Act that gave all slaves in the British Empire their freedom.

The life of William exemplifies how God can use someone committed to a biblical worldview to transform an entire society. He understood that biblical truth isn't to be confined to the spiritual areas of life only.

A Christian Mind

- **Presupposition** – is a fact or statement such as a proposition, axiom or notion that is presupposed or taken for granted. It is similar to the word 'assumption.'
- **Assumption** – to assume is to believe a concept or view point without thinking critically about it. It is to take something for granted. We each make assumptions about many things and such beliefs can be held consciously or unconsciously.
- **Worldview** – A worldview is the total set of assumptions that a person holds either consciously or unconsciously about the world and how it works. It is sometimes referred to as a belief system or mind set. We typically acquire our worldviews in childhood and youth, yet later in life we rarely examine the assumptions that comprise it.
- **Reality** – is simply what truly exists and how it actually works. The term encompasses both the natural and the supernatural realms – all that is. Reality means the ultimate facts of existence, not just what we think we know or see, assume to be true or wish to be true. Our own understanding of reality is always conditioned and subject to change over time; it is limited by our human ability to understand by our present state of knowledge and by what sources we have or accept for our views. Believers understand that true reality comes from the nature and will of our Creator

and Sustainer. Thus when we accept God as Lord of our lives we are also committing ourselves to lives based on this actual reality, not lesser standards for trust, understanding or determining right choices.

- **Vocation** – comes from the Latin word ‘*voco*’ from which the English word ‘voice’ is derived. The original meaning indicated hearing and responding to the voice of God. A vocation was God’s summons or call to an area of service. Today the word vocation has lost much of this original spiritual meaning and typically refers to employment, occupation or a trade.

Renewing Your Mind – *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Romans 12:2

- Ephesians 4:22-24 – ‘put off the old self,’ which is characterised by false beliefs and worldly destructive behaviours, and to put on the new self created to be like God.

‘If we want to live straight, we have to think straight. If we want to think straight, we have to have renewed minds.’ John Stott.

Reality #1 – The transaction of ‘putting off’ false worldviews and ‘putting on’ the biblical worldview does not happen automatically when we accept Christ as Savior.

- The process is not easy and simple. It is an on-going, life long process.
 - It is a discipline empowered by the Holy Spirit. If we do not learn this discipline, by default we will think and operate according to the dominant worldview of our surrounding culture.
- a. For many Christians, biblical faith influences only a small part of their lives and thought.
 - It is not uncommon for believers to live with two different belief systems – one for their ‘spiritual lives’ and one for the ‘marketplace and their personal lives.’
 - b. For nations to be discipled as Christ commanded in Matthew 28:18-20, followers of Christ must put on the biblical worldview and then apply its

principles to every area of life – not just spiritual areas, but to every area. Then they can purposefully take the truth out into the world.

NEXT WEEK - How will cultures be transformed and entire nations be disciplined?

SESSION 2

WORLDVIEWS AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Introduction

Colossians 2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Early 19th Century America

- Churches were very involved in charitable activities, so much so that they were said to be promoting a “Benevolent Empire.”
- Countless Christian charities ‘served the poor’ by meeting their material and physical needs and by distributing tracts and bibles.

Why were they doing all this?

- Biblical beliefs, Christians worshipped a God, who through death on a cross exhibited the literal meaning of compassion; ‘suffering together with another.’
- Christians gave wholeheartedly of themselves and suffered together with the poor.
- They sacrificed in gratitude for the suffering of God on their behalf and in obedience to ‘biblical teaching.’ (18th, 19th century Christian Leaders e.g. 1st Great Awakening 1730 – 1755 John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Wesley, Howell Harris, 2nd Great Awakening 1790 – 1840 Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, Peter Cartright
- They worshipped a God who showed compassion and at the same time demanded ‘change,’ so they laboured toward the spiritual and personal transformation of the people they served.

But beginning in the 1840s, things began to *CHANGE*.

One of the first challenges to this charity consensus came from the nation’s leading journalist of the time, HORACE GREELEY, who was the FOUNDER AND EDITOR of the New York Tribune.

Horace Greeley (3 Feb 1811 – 29 Nov 1872)

- Born to Zaccheus and Mary Greeley who were poor farmers, declined a scholarship to Phillips Exeter Academy and left school at the age of 14 and apprenticed as a printer.
- Greeley prided himself in taking a radical position in all sorts of social issues.
- Founder of the New York Tribune and the Liberal Republican Party.
- When the new Republican Party was founded in 1854, Greeley made the Tribune its unofficial national organ.
- Greeley also made the Tribune the leading newspaper opposing 'Slave Power.'
- Stood as a 'Presidential Candidate' in the 1872 presidential elections on a Liberal Republican Party and Democratic Party ticket. He is the only presidential candidate that died during the electoral process though he lost in a landslide.
- The crushing defeat was not Greeley's only misfortune in 1872. Greeley was among several high profile investors who were defrauded by Phillip Arnold in a diamond and gemstone hoax. Shortly afterward, Whitelaw Reid from the New York Herald gained control of the Tribune.

Greeley believed that:

- 'the heart of man is not depraved, that his passions do not prompt to wrong doing, and do not therefore by their actions produce evil.'
- 'poverty could end by redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor so that all receive an equal share.'
- 'evil flows only from social repression.'
- 'if people are allowed full scope, free play, and perfect and complete development then universal happiness must be the result
- 'create a new form of society in which this shall be possiblethen you will have a perfect society; then you will have the 'Kingdom of Heaven.'

These new ideas entered mainstream American society through a series of newspaper debates that Greeley conducted with Henry J. Raymond (1820 – 1869), a devout Christian and founder of the *New York Times*.

- For Raymond, Greeley's ideas were 'in the most direct hostility to the doctrines of the Bible, they recognize no absolute distinction between right and wrong.....they are the exact opposite of Christianity; they start from opposite fundamental principles and aim at precisely opposite results.'
- Through the public debates, Greeley effectively won over many of his journalists colleagues, who in turn promoted his ideas through their newspapers.

Over time, Greeley's ideas became dominant, and influential, the culture.

- Americans increasingly saw poverty as rooted not in individual human sinfulness on the part of rich and poor alike but in larger impersonal, social and structural inequalities.
 - The solution became political rather than spiritual, and political power was seen as the primary means for advancing towards a just society.
 - As Greeley implied the perfect society was achievable through enlightened government policy and the creation of new social structures and programs.
 - The ultimate solution to eliminating poverty belonged to the government, which held the power to tax citizens and redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.
- By the 1960s, this notion that the government was the solution had so firmly taken root within American culture that a 1964 economic report to President Johnson boasted that 'the elimination of poverty is well within the means of federal, state and local governments.'
 - Such thinking resulted in the expansion of government welfare programs. Billions was spent on this government 'war on poverty.'
 - At the same time the people receiving government welfare swelled from 4.5 million in 1965 to 10.8 million in 1974.
 - Over time private, church based charity efforts dramatically decreased.
- Many Christians began to believe that caring for the poor was not their responsibility, but that of the government.

- The darkest legacy of the welfare experiment centred on the lost motivation, vision, and dependency it created among the poor.
- The welfare system harmed the poor by reducing them from human being to mouths to be fed.
- The Christian idea of compassion - of suffering together with – dwindled. Compassion was reduced to a weak feeling of pity that carried no call for personal involvement in the lives of the poor.

OVER TIME, THE DOMINANT WORLDVIEW OF SOCIETY MAY CHANGE AS NEW BELIEFS REPLACE OLD ONES. THIS CHANGE CAN BE ACCOMPANIED BY DRAMATIC AND OFTEN UNINTENDED SOCIAL SHIFTS.

Part I

Culture/Society

In every society there exists a dominant worldview shared by the majority. However there are always people who hold minority beliefs. Still the dominant worldview of a society tends to wield the most influence in shaping its culture and institutions. The dominant worldview of our society influences us profoundly.

- It determines which things the society does and does not value.
- It is evident through the society's educational, political, social, religious, legal, and economic institutions.
- It also resonates through media and popular culture.

The word culture derives from the Latin word '*cultus*' which means habitation, tiling, refinement or worship. (From it we get the English word '*cult*').

- A culture is therefore 'a particular pattern of thought, speech, and behaviour that stems from deeply held beliefs about the nature of reality.'
- These patterns, covering most aspects of a people's lives pass from one generation to the next. It is in this sense that we speak of "Malaysian culture" or "Indian culture."

CULTURES ALTER OVER TIME BECAUSE THEIR *RELIGIOUS BELIEFS* AT THEIR CORE *CHANGE*.

The word “society” has a similar definition.

- A society is the union of people into a community or nation. The majority shares a common purpose, traditions, core assumptions about reality and patterns of behaviour.

Dominant – the word ‘*dominant*’ is an adjective used to describe that which exerts the greatest influence. In this session, the word describes a society’s prevailing set of beliefs.

Philosophy – the word comes from two Greek words ‘*phileo*’ which means love and ‘*sophia*’ which means wisdom. So philosophy means to love wisdom.

Proverbs 2:6 For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 3:13 Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and gains understanding.

Question 1 – Based on the verses from Proverbs, how should a Christian regard wisdom?

Question 2 – Colossians 2:8 refers to worldly philosophy. What words does Paul use to describe it?

Question 3 – What does worldly philosophy depend on?

Question 4 – What do you think Paul means by “the basic principles of this world?”

Part II

A. Worldviews on the Move

1. **Worldviews are constantly on the move.** They spread outward across oceans and around the world.
 - A classic example the spread of Christianity. Jesus commanded his followers to be *“My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)*
 - From Jerusalem, Christianity spread to every continent and nearly every nation on earth.
2. **Worldviews often originate in the minds of intellectuals, philosophers and theologians.** From there artists and musicians illustrate them.
 - It has been said if you want to know how the next generation will live, study the art and the music of today. Then it spreads to other educated or professional people such as teachers, lawyers, pastors, journalists and politicians.
 - Eventually they can become “institutionalized” as laws, governing policies and educational curricula.
 - As they continue to penetrate a culture they eventually affect the everyday behaviour and lifestyle of the people.
3. **Worldviews also spread through time, from one generation to the next.**
 - They pass from parents to children. In the Old Testament, God instructed parents of his chosen nation Israel, to accurately teach his revealed commands and laws from generation to generation.
(Deut 4:1-10)

B. A Diversity of Worldviews

Throughout history there has been and will continue to be a wide range of worldviews. We will arrange this broad range into three general worldview categories.

1. **NATURALISM.** Naturalism sometimes referred to as secularism or materialism encompasses a set of beliefs that denies or ignores the existence of spiritual reality.

- According to naturalism, the physical universe is all that exists.
- There is no God or gods and no spirit within human beings.
- All phenomena in the world can be explained through science defined laws or principles governing the physical universe and chance combinations and interactions of matter.

Today naturalism is the dominant worldview in much of the industrialised West. It gained supremacy through the widespread acceptance of British Botanist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) theory of natural evolution.

Naturalism underpins the modern faiths of *SCIENTISM* and *POSTMODERNISM*.

2. ANIMISM. Sometimes referred to as PANTHEISM, animism is a set of beliefs that sees the world as full of (or animated with) spiritual beings. There are scores of gods, demons and angels.

- According to animism ultimate reality is fundamentally spiritual.
- The line separating physical and spiritual reality is weak or nonexistent, with spirits inhabiting rocks, trees and other elements of nature.
- The gods of animism maybe expressed as impersonal forces or even personal even humanlike beings.
- Their actions are often arbitrary and unpredictable.

Animism underpins many ancient religions such as SHINTO in Japan, and HINDUISM in India and is still dominant in many less industrialized societies in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In addition elements of the modern New Age movement in the West have also adopted some elements of animistic concepts.

3. THEISM. In this study the word will mean the belief in one God who is the all powerful creator of the physical universe.

- According to theism reality is comprised of both physical and spiritual reality.
- The physical universe exists but so does God who created and sustains it and who has a real existence apart from it.
- Likewise human life is an inseparable combination of a physical body and a spirit.

Theism contrasts with Naturalism in that its proponents believe that God exists.

Theism contrasts with Animism in that there is only one all powerful creator God, rather than many spirits controlling events.

Judaism, Islam and Christianity are the three major world religions that subscribe to this general belief.

Part III

A. THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

While there is a diversity of beliefs among the world's peoples, the Bible declares that there is only "*one true reality.*" If this is the case then there can be only one worldview that reflects the *TRUTH.*

1. **The biblical worldview – the true worldview is God's revelation to us in Scripture and through creation.** The Bible teaches us that this worldview is actually embedded within the hearts of all people though humanity's fallen nature diminishes its presence.

Romans 2:14-15 (NLT) Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know His law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts for their conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

2. **When our minds embrace the biblical worldview, we begin to see the world as it really is – as God created and sustains it.**
 - As we believe and act on this worldview our lives manifest healthy, fruitful living.
 - This will be good not only for us but for our families, communities, and societies as well.
3. **The bible teaches us that human nature is not perfect, but fallen.** Because of fallen human nature we cannot clearly see true reality without God's help.
 - Naturalism, Animism and some forms of Theism are distortions of the truth that prevent us from clearly viewing all of reality.

- Either they allow us to see a portion of what is real or they distort the portion we see. Often they do both.
4. **The Biblical worldview by contrast allows us to see all that is real.**
- When we “put on” the biblical, we can understand God as he truly is – and ourselves and creation as we were made to be.

B. The Truth Sets You Free

1. Begin by reading Isaiah 45:18-19 and John 17:17.
How do these verses shape your understanding about the truth and where it originates?
2. According to John 8:31, how can we know the truth?
3. According to Galatians 4:3, what will the truth set us free from?
4. The Bible describes the relationship between Jesus and the truth.
Read John 1:17, John 14:6 and John 18:37.
How do these verses describe the truth and how can we know it?
“If Christ has prepared a place for us, He will prepare us for it.”
When Christ said “I am truth” he said in effect “I am King.”
He conquers by the convincing evidence of truth; he rules by the commanding power of truth. The subjects of this kingdom are those that are of the truth.
5. In John 16:12-13 read about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the truth. What do these verses further reveal about the truth and how we can know it?
6. Many people doubt that absolute truth exists or can be known because varying peoples and cultures understand truth differently.
Pontius Pilate reflected this sceptical view in his conversation with Jesus when he asked “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Based on what you have

studied so far, how does Scripture differ from this sceptical view?

7. The Bible clearly teaches that absolute truth exists and that it is the same for all peoples and cultures – whether they believe it or not! Read Romans 1:18-20, Romans 2:14-15, John 1:1-3, 14 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. How can people everywhere know the truth?
8. Read Psalm 119:30, Proverbs 23:23, and Zechariah 8:19. How does the Bible instruct us to respond to the truth?
9. According to Acts 17:10-12, how can we know if an idea or teaching is “true” or a “lie/false?”
10. Write a summary statement about what you have learned about biblical truth.

C. Exchanging Lies for the Truth

Every Christian engages in a lifelong process of identifying and putting off false elements of his or her worldview and putting on God’s view of the world – the biblical worldview.

- 1. The renewal of the mind is central to the process of sanctification.**
The putting off and putting on process requires us to gain deeper understanding of, and live increasingly more consistently with the biblical worldview.
- 2. It is only to the degree that individuals and societies put off the false worldviews and put on God’s view of the world that they experience life, freedom, and healing as God intends.**
 - False worldviews lead to bondage, impoverishment, corruption, and ultimately death.
 - Falsehood vies for authority in our lives.

3. How has your culture influenced you?

- i. Review the worldview categories listed in this session (naturalism, animism and biblical theism). To what degree have you encountered any or all of these worldview categories in your society?
- ii. Which worldview has the greatest influence on your society? How is this influence evident in your society's values, religious beliefs, institutions, laws, and or policies?
- iii. Think back to a time when you visited another culture or hosted people from another culture. Did that experience open your eyes to your culture's dominant worldview? If so what did you learn?
- iv. Describe one way in which the dominant worldview of your culture has affected your thinking and behaviour either positively or negatively?
- v. What obstacles do you face in trying to live according to the biblical worldview, instead of this dominant worldview? Have you overcome any of these obstacles? If so how?
- vi. Are you familiar with the worldview of each of the primary religious groups in the world? (Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism)

NEXT SESSION – The Biblical understanding of reality!