



TRUTH MATTERS

A Newsletter Discussing Matters Related to Truth Because Truth Matters

Lighthouse Baptist Church
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Dethroning Lesser “gods”

Establishing a God-Centered World-view

Introduction:

Every person lives with a worldview. Every person sees the world in light of a few basic presuppositions he has formulated in his mind. Every person interprets reality and world events in light of these presuppositions. But more practically, every person makes his daily choices in light of his worldview.

A person’s worldview really reveals his belief system – who or what he worships.

I am convinced that the problem within the American evangelical church is not trying to convince Christians of a God-centered worldview; but to convince them to hold it consistently. I doubt I will meet a professing believer in America who refuses to admit that he needs to hold a God-centered worldview. But what is startling me is seeing how many claim to hold a God-centered worldview compared with how few there are who hold it consistently. What is more, I am shocked at the justifications evangelicals offer when they abandon a God-centered worldview in favor of another one, namely, the worldview known as the “American Dream.” I want to demonstrate that it is a fallacy to hold to two worldviews at the same time. Jesus intimates this with his words, “You cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16.13). One cannot embrace one worldview in theory and another one in practice. The one he practices is the one he holds. Thus, I say again, a person’s worldview really reveals his belief system – who or what he worships. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to draw the necessary conclusion from this paragraph. There are plethoras of professing evangelical “Christians” who do not hold a God-centered worldview.

Now, there is admittedly a difference between abandoning a God-centered worldview and not holding it consistently. The purpose of this article addresses both. If you are an evangelical who has abandoned a God-centered worldview in favor of the American Dream; or if, like me, you struggle to hold your God-centered worldview consistently, this article speaks to you. The following sentences reflect my own formulation of what Jonathan Edwards called a “God-enhanced life,” of what John Piper calls “Christian Hedonism,” of what John MacArthur calls a “Lordship Lifestyle” and what I call a God-centered world-view.

The process for developing and the process for strengthening a God-centered worldview is the same. An individual must simply start with life where he is and observe a simple thought process. To begin with, he will need some basic presuppositions and then he will need to see the stages in which a worldview is formed and/or held with consistency.

Necessary Presuppositions

1. Mankind is created with a will in the image of God.

This is the basic element that distinguishes humankind from animal kind. Mankind is not a higher form of animal. Mankind is distinct from animals because he has personality (mind, will and emotions). No animal can reason, emote or choose. Animals operate on basic instincts and learned reactions. Therefore, no animal can determine his choices. He has none. Mankind, however, has choice because he has a will. This will is part of the image of God in mankind.

God is also a person containing everything that is necessary to be a person (mind, will and emotions). Mankind’s will is distinct from the will of God in that God is the only being in the universe that is absolutely free. Mankind cannot have absolute freedom to do as he pleases for there is a higher being already doing what he pleases, namely, God. Absolute freedom goes to the very nature of the definition of being God.

Therefore, mankind’s freedom to choose is limited under that which pleases God.¹

2. All humans possess the same innate core desires of security, contentment and joy.

Every decision an individual makes goes to satisfy one or all of these core desires thus producing happiness. Humans build houses, purchase cars and invest in 401K plans for their security. At the same time, they update their outdated cars every three years because they are no

¹ Since our God is in heaven and does all he pleases (Psalm 115.3), everything that happens in the universe – including every human choice – is part of an elaborate plan that pleases God.

longer content with their safety ratings and amenities. They grow discontent.

Humans seek relationships through friendships, marriages, clubs and classmates for the security, contentment and joy they provide.

Humans are like mice on a deadly pace in life, scurrying from one object to another hoping that what they have just started nibbling at will really provide them with a good meal. Mice chew on everything looking to satisfy their hungers. So do humans!

3. Every choice one makes has his own happiness as its intended goal.

I am careful to select this word “every” because that is precisely what I mean. There is no choice made by any human that is not in an attempt to make him secure, content, and joyful – happy. Blaise Pascal, writing in the 17th Century said,

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”²

Something deep within a person tells him whether or not the avenue he is pursuing or is about to pursue is indeed worth pursuing.

4. Every decision is made on the basis of a belief system.

In other words, you do what you do because you believe it will make you secure, content and joyful – happy. The key word is “believe.” Some particular path has held a promise before you and you believe it!

Let me interrupt the necessary presuppositions and begin explaining the necessary thought process.

Necessary Thought Process

Stage 1 – Promise: The declaration of a desirable future end.

All belief systems begin with promises. Promises are declarations of certain realities that will or will not come to pass in the future. All promises embrace the future. “I promise to never do that again (in the future).” Or, “I promise to do xyz for you (in the future).” This is precisely how the Bible addresses faith in Hebrews 11:1

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen” in the future. All belief systems begin with a declaration of some future and certain event or result.

Furthermore, most promises come to us conditionally. “If you do xyz, you will experience xyz!” God, for example, says in Hebrews 11:6 that those who come to God for the reward must believe that he exists. Do you catch the condition for gaining the reward? An investment banker declares that you will be happiest during your retirement if you do not have to worry about your finances. That declaration carries with it a promise and assumes a condition, namely, you must do what is necessary to be financially secure.

Stage 2 – Worship: Attributing value with such a degree that it warrants a pursuit.

Once presented with a promise, you are faced with a question: “Do I believe this?” This question will always be answered the same way. You will appeal to the highest value in your life to see if the promise is consistent with that value. In essence, every decision in life is a value judgment. The second stage is called “worship.” Worship comes from the Latin *worthscape*. Worship is attributing value or worth to something with such degree that it warrants your pursuit. In other words, it is so valuable that you make it your treasure and therefore pursue it.

Stage 3 – Faith: Entrusting one’s future hope and happiness to the promises offered by that which one worships.

The pursuit of that which one treasures, along with all the promises that it holds forth is called “living by faith.” Living by faith simply involves pursuing a promise. “Faith in” or “belief in” or “trusting in” (they are all synonymous) means entrusting one’s future hope and happiness to the promises held forth by what he worships. The real question of stage 3, then, must be, “Is that which I value really the highest value possible?” In other words, will that which I worship and thus believe in and pursue really provide for me eternal hope and happiness? Eternal hope and happiness is what a person wants most, is it not? How many people sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the immediate? After all, a person wants that which will make him the happiest for the longest time. The Bible calls these things “fullness of joy” (John 15:11) and “eternal life” (cf. John 17:3 - life which is quantitatively as well as qualitatively full).

Stage 4 – Service: Positioning oneself under the prescriptions of that which one worships so as to maximize one’s benefit from everything it has to offer.

The pursuit of obtaining the promises held forth by that which one treasures is called “service.” One

² Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensees*, trans. By W.F. Trotter (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958), p. 113 (thought #425).

demonstrates that he esteems the treasure as valuable by doing what it says he must do in order to obtain the promise. This demonstration of value by obedience is the biblical definition of service (cf. Rom. 6:16-17).

Perhaps an analogy: When you get sick, you go to your doctor. Why? Because he is valuable to you. He is “all-knowing” (when it comes to the body). You are limited in knowledge. He is “all powerful” (when it comes to offering a cure); You are weak and helpless. He has what you need and you are in need. Therefore, you come to him esteeming his credentials. Upon further dialogue and examination, he holds forth a conditional promise: “If you will take xyz medicine and perform xyz regimen, you will be free from your ailment.” Because you esteem him as valuable, you trust him and believe not just his promise but also his prescribed pathway! Therefore, you obey. When you return two weeks later he confirms that you are well and as you get up to leave he says, “Thank you for letting me serve you.” You reply, “No! Thank you!” You see, you served the doctor by enabling the doctor to serve you. The doctor wants to feel needed. That is what glorifies his credentials. The same is true of a trusted auto mechanic, lawyer, etc.

At the highest level, however, this is how you serve God. You glorify the credentials of God by esteeming him as valuable, trusting not just in his promises but in his prescriptions and therefore obeying him. In the process, you get what you need and God gets glory. God is glorified; you are satisfied.³ In this way, God’s glory is tied to your being happy.

“Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). If your actions are not a result of your passion for happiness in God; or if your actions are not a result of your desire to pursue Christ’s prescriptions and do whatever it takes to maximize your benefit from what God has to offer, then you sin.

There is obedience that comes from faith (Rom. 16:26). In other words, when you are entrusting your future hope and happiness to the promises that God offers then you will do whatever it takes to position yourself under those promises so as to maximize your benefit from them. In positioning yourself under them, you will do whatever God commands. This is obedience that comes from faith (cf. Gal. 5:5).

Let’s leave the process and return to the last necessary presupposition:

5. Ultimate happiness is found in God alone.

The Bible declares that God makes “known the path of life; in his presence there is fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). The

Bible declares these things. That is a promise. In making God your treasure, you will be pursuing promises along three veins: (1) “pleasures forevermore” – this goes to eternal contentment; (2) “fullness of joy” – this goes to eternal joy; (3) following the “path of life” – this goes to security. You will always know and thus rest secure in that you are on the right path.

Furthermore, God has invited you to come and drink from a fountain that quenches all your thirst. You can come and drink to your soul’s delight (Is. 55:1-2; John 4:13-14; 6:35). Do you really believe that God will show you the path of life and that in his presence is fullness of joy and that at his right hand there are pleasures forevermore? If every decision you make is to bring about your happiness, then why not make every decision based on that which will bring about the fullest joy possible (John 10:10; 15:11)?

Jesus gives us a one-verse parable about the worth of God in Matthew 13:44: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, when a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy, went and sold everything he had and bought the field.” The kingdom of heaven is worth that much. God is the ultimate treasure. The question is stinging – does Jesus Christ mean enough to you that you would go and sell everything you have if it meant having him? Would you use all of your earthly resources to maximize your benefit from all Jesus Christ has to offer (cf. Acts 20:22-24; Philippians 1:20-21; 3:7-11)?

The Bible commands us to worship God:

“Whether therefore you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

We have already seen that the way one glorifies God is by serving him with his needs so God can serve him with his fullness. How does a person worship God? By serving God. That is, by esteeming God as so valuable that one would willingly put himself under God’s every prescription so as to maximize the benefit he receives from God, thus glorifying God’s credentials. How does a person serve God? By worshipping him. That is, by esteeming God as so valuable that one willingly puts himself under God’s every prescription so as to maximize the benefit from everything God has to offer, namely, eternal life. This is not just a process, it is a closed circle. The starting point of the one is the ending point of the other. God’s glory is inextricably linked to one’s happiness.

Therefore, God can say some amazing things like, “I will not turn away from doing good to them . . . I will rejoice to do them good . . . with all my heart and all my soul” (Jer. 32:40-41). God is committed to doing us good with all his might while at the same time being committed to

³ John Piper describes Christian Hedonism with the sentence, “God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him.”

doing everything for the sake of his own name (cf. Is. 43:7; 48:9; Ezek. 36:22-23; et. al.).

Conclusion:

As I said at the beginning, a person cannot hold two worldviews at the same time. Christians, in particular cannot hold one worldview in theory (God-centered) and practice another (“American Dream”). The biblical axiom is true: what a person worships is what he will serve and what he serves he worships (Rom. 6:16-18). Jesus said elsewhere, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). Notice the order: treasure leads; hearts follow.

If you treasure the financial freedom that comes from money, you will serve money. That is, you will use all your resources (time, talents and treasures) to do whatever it takes to position yourself under the prescriptions that money holds out so as to maximize your benefit from everything it has to offer.

If you worship money, you will serve money. You will put yourself under its every prescription to obey its commands. You will use every resource available to you in order to gain a bigger reward. That is, you will sell all you have in order to buy the “money” in the field. You will read *Barron’s* and the *Wall Street Journal*; you will take investment seminars and join investment clubs so as to enhance your abilities (talents). You will scrape and save and pinch pennies. You will calculate and strategize and amortize so as to invest as much money as wisely as possible (treasures). You will work overtime and skip vacations (time). You will not give out of your necessity because you will do whatever it takes to maximize your potential gain from whatever money (your god) has to offer you.

Going after lesser gods

The Bible says, “All have sinned and come short of God’s glory” (Rom. 3:23). What does it mean to come short of God’s glory? Paul gives the answer in Romans 1:23 where he proclaims that all mankind exchanges the glory of the incorruptible God for the glory that comes from created things, or in things that are of a lesser value than God.

Coming “short of God’s glory” means that mankind looks to things other than God, and thus, lesser in value, to meet his need of security, contentment and joy. He serves other things with his needs glorifying the credentials of unworthy things. He worships things that do not measure up to the value and worth (glory) of God.

God says this to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 2:13: “My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” This is

the heart of evil – finding satisfaction in the little moisture that comes from sucking on sand when we could drink at the living fountain. We have trained ourselves to be satisfied with moist dirt when we could have a cold, pure fountain.

The problem with humans is not that their desires are too strong but that they are not strong enough. We choose to pursue earthly things that cannot provide for us a lifetime of happiness, let alone an eternal life of happiness. Listen to C.S. Lewis:

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”⁴

The problem with drink and sex and everything else under the sun is that the buzz they provide fizzles out leaving us empty and unsatisfied. Hence, we journey from one thing to the next in a constant pursuit. We have trained ourselves to be pleased with the pittance of satisfaction that comes from this world – with the little security that comes from 401K plans, with the little contentment that comes from having a family, with the little joy that comes from material goods and status. We have preoccupied ourselves with this life, having not spent enough time meditating on the next life, that we have not set our affections on things above (Col. 3:1-3, esp. v.2). We have not taken seriously the command to not love the world (1 John 2:15-17). Our treasures are being stored here where moth and rust corrupt and thieves can break-in and steal (Matt. 6:19-20).

Sin, by definition is *everything I do when my heart is not satisfied with God*. Or, sin is *entrusting my future hope and happiness to anything less than God*.

Summary:

Learn how to talk to yourself about the mundane decisions in your life:

- How you spend / manage your *time*.
- How you use and advance your *talents*.
- How you manage, spend and / or hoard your *treasures*.
- How you handle the *truth*.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory And Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp.1-2.

- How you rear your *troops* (children).
- How you use or abuse your *temple* (body).

They really manifest who or what you serve and who or what you worship. Of any choice made in one of the six categories of stewardship listed above, ask the following questions:

Stage 1 – Does this choice manifest that I believe the promises of God? Which promise is held before me in this instance?

Stage 2 – How does this choice demonstrate that Christ is my treasure? Do I worship him?

Stage 3 – How does this choice manifest that I am pursuing God's promises? Do I trust him?

Stage 4 – How does this choice serve God with my needs? Am I positioning myself under his prescriptions to do whatever it takes to maximize my benefit from what God has offered?

Remember – Your pursuit of maximum benefit in God results in: “God is glorified; I am satisfied.”