



Truth

On Tough Texts

WWW.THESCRPTUREALONE.COM A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH ISSUE 74 (November/December 2010)

What in the World is a Biblical Worldview?

Psalm 119:11

There has been in recent years much discussion of what has been dubbed a “Biblical Worldview,” or, “Christian Worldview.” While much of that discussion is good, some of it is lacking not only in *clarity* (that is, what such a worldview actually *is*), but more importantly, in my view, in *application* (that is, what such a worldview demands in *practice*). This subject has been bothering me for quite some time, for while I have heard several Christians say they have a Biblical Worldview, their practice actually speaks much louder of something quite different. I would, therefore, like to offer a few thoughts that I hope you will prayerfully consider.

What Is a Worldview?

The word *worldview* actually comes directly from a German word that was coined in the mid-nineteenth century, *weltanschauung* (pronounced 'velt-än-shaü-əŋ), which can be literally rendered “look onto the world.” Webster defines this as “a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a specific standpoint.” James W. Sire, author and former editor for InterVarsity Press, offers a more detailed definition:

A commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic construction of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.¹

Michael J. Vlach, Associate Professor of Theology at the Master’s Seminary, offers this simpler alternative: “A worldview is any philosophy, ideology, religion, or movement that provides an all-encompassing approach to understanding reality.”² Based upon all that, we would humbly offer the following:

A worldview is the perspective from which a person, with all his presuppositions, attitudes, and beliefs, perceives and approaches, either consciously or subconsciously, the world, life, and everything in them.

With that in mind, it is easy to see that every single person, whether he knows it or not, has a worldview. Every person *perceives* the world and everything in it and therefore *approaches* it in a way that satisfies him. Francis Schaeffer wrote much about the decline of Western thought and culture. Addressing our present subject, he noted:

People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize. By *presuppositions* we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world. Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People’s presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions.³

While many people will add their own unique twist, there are several basic worldviews to choose from. For ex-

ample, if you approach everything in life from the perspective of acquiring money and possessions, your worldview is materialism. If you approach everything from a desire for pleasure, your worldview is hedonism. If you approach everything from an exclusively intellectual perspective, appealing to reason as the only source of knowledge or justification, your worldview is rationalism. If you approach everything from the perspective that nothing is absolute, that all value and “truth” depends upon each person’s perception, your worldview is relativism. And the list goes on.

The key principle to understand in all this, then, is that your worldview will automatically apply itself to what you think and do. “Keep thy heart with all diligence,” Solomon declares, “for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23).

What is a *Biblical* Worldview?

With the forgoing as our foundation, and after several months grappling with all this, we would offer the following definition of a biblical worldview:

A Biblical Worldview, created by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and the justifying work of Christ, views, understands, and approaches everything in life through the lens of Scripture, that Scripture alone defines reality, delineates truth, and dictates our attitudes and actions.

Now, does this mean that every issue and question has a “proof text.” Well, yes and no. *Yes* because everything is addressed in Scripture, whether in specific word or general principle. *No*, however, because a biblical worldview, we submit, goes deeper than that. It considers the full revelation of Scripture, understanding what all of it says on a given issue, both in philosophy and practice. This will become clearer in our third point below.

While one might think that every born again Christian would automatically have such a view, nothing could be further from the real state of affairs. In a 2003 survey conducted by the Barna Group, it was discovered that only 9% of born again Christians have such a perspective on life. Shocking? Yes. Surprising? Not at all. Why? The reason is obvious. The church has become so immersed in the world, through a plethora of worldviews, that it has become tainted and infected. One cannot live in a hog barn 24 hours a day, for example, and not become contaminated, unless he wears plenty of protective gear. Likewise, unless Christians “put on [and never take off, as the Greek verb tense indicates] the whole armour of God,” they will not “stand against” (*stēnai pros*, hold one’s ground) Satan and his systems (Eph. 6:11).

The sad fact is that the vast majority of the church, as this survey inarguably confirms, does not *think biblically*. A case in point is the following statement by one of today’s leading “Christian leaders”: “The ground we have in common with unbelievers is not the Bible, but our common

needs, hurts, and interests as human beings. *You cannot start with a text.*”⁴ Is that a biblical worldview? Of course not. It’s obviously a secular humanistic view. What is even more appalling is how many evangelicals have followed this man and his secular thinking and then built churches based on, at the very least, a mild form of humanism.

We, therefore, want to begin with a text, Psalm 119:11: **Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.** The Hebrew word translated **hid** (*tsāphan*) means to hide, to keep secret. It’s used of concealing something, often of great value, as that precious picture of when the baby Moses was hidden (Ex. 2:2–3) and when Rahab hid the spies (Josh. 2:4). Used figuratively, it speaks of “laying up in the heart, putting back that which we value.” The Word of God is, indeed, priceless, the most valuable thing we can own.

If we could pick one verse that is representative of all 176 verses in this Psalm, this is probably it. It strikes us as the essence of the psalmist’s point. In the many months of my study and preaching of this psalm, this verse seemed to be the key to the whole matter. To hide the Word of God in our hearts is to be totally *captive in it, committed to it, and controlled by it*. Further, to hide God’s Word in the **heart** is to recognize that it alone is sufficient to fill that **heart** with all that is needed for living.

Heart (*lēb*) has a wide range of meanings. While it refers to the physical organ, it much more often refers to one’s inner self and nature, including the intellect, emotions, and will, that is, the human personality. So where do we hide God’s Word? *In our whole personality!* The Word of God must govern our entire being. We find this very picture, for example, in Genesis 6:5, where “GOD [YHWH, *yahweh*] saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Everything about man in that day was evil; not a single thought, emotion, or choice was righteous.

Spurgeon well said of the Psalmist: “He did not *wear* a text on his heart as a *charm*, but he *hid* it in his heart as a *rule*.”⁵ While many today wear a cross around their neck, some kind of religious symbol on a charm bracelet, a bumper sticker on their car that says, “I love Jesus,” or other outward symbolism, the psalmist says he **hid** God’s **word** in his **heart**, that is, his whole self. *Symbolism* is one thing; *substance* is quite another.

What, then, is the end of all this? Simply that it is such an immersion in God’s Word that keeps us from **sin**. We would submit, therefore, that this verse encapsulates a biblical worldview. If God’s Word is at the core of our entire being, it is going to dictate everything that pertains to life and then protect us from any other worldview. We will *think* biblically (the intellect), *react* biblically (the emotions), and we will *choose* biblically (the will).

With the footing and foundation laid, we are now prepared for the structure.

What Is the Application of a Biblical Worldview?

The Principle

In researching this article, I came across another in which the writer well says that the Christian worldview hangs on four strategic events. First, the *Creation* addresses how we got here; a perfect eternal God created all things. Second, the *Fall* explains what went wrong; sin, evil, suffering, and death entered by a single act of disobedience to God. Third, the *Incarnation* explains the solution; God's Son in the flesh, Jesus Christ, paid for sin. Fourth, *Restoration* tells us where history is headed, namely, a New Heaven and New Earth in which righteousness dwells.

What that article seemed to me to lack, however, was another "strategic event," *Transformation*, that is, the transformation of life that occurs in a person who receives Christ as Savior and Lord. While some argue that this is covered by Incarnation, that is clearly not true for certain evangelicals who argue against Lordship in salvation, who maintain that no repentance is required and no obedience implied when someone "asks Jesus into their heart."

We would submit, therefore, such transformation not only *means* something but also *demands* something. Second Corinthians 5:17 declares that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." "New" here is *kainos*, which refers to something new in *quality* (not *time*, as *neos* means). It, therefore, pictures a creature that has never existed before, a creature with a new character ("the divine nature," 2 Pet. 1:4). When Christ comes into a life, that life changes. To talk about a "conversion" (Latin *convertere*, "to turn around, transform") that doesn't change anything is ludicrous, to say the least. There is no such thing as spiritual *life* without spiritual *living*. "New" means *new*, not "improved, renovated, or enhanced old."⁶

So, to have a true *biblical* worldview means that because we are regenerated and are new creatures with a divine nature, we think, feel, act, react, and live differently than those who live by any other worldview. This does not mean thinking biblically about just "*spiritual* things" (a great misnomer about this issue), but about *all* things.

The Application

The survey mentioned earlier makes this point to a certain degree. It points out that those who have a biblical worldview (the mere 9% of born again Christians remember) live a life that is much different from those who do not. For example, they are much less likely to engage in non-marital sex, use profanity, gamble, view pornography, get drunk, approve of homosexuality, or condone abortion.

But while all those are certainly well and good, are they really *proofs* of a biblical worldview? I know many non-Christians who are just as opposed to those things as Christians are. In fact, most of those things are opposed by Mus-

lims—do they have a biblical worldview? It can be easily demonstrated further from history that many non-Christian cultures have been opposed to many of those things simply because such behavior has a negative effect on society.

I am, therefore, convinced that there is something much more important that we are missing here. Yes, the above things are obviously biblical mandates, but they do not prove that one has a biblical worldview. That is why we said earlier that such matters are not just about "proof texts," but rather the underlying philosophy of the totality of Scripture. In other words, we examine not only *precepts* and *precedents*, but also underlying general *principles*.

In all the research I did for this article, there was oddly very little practical application offered. To illustrate, what benefit would there have been if after men discovered the physical phenomenon of "lift" it had not then been applied in the real world in making airplanes fly? I would, therefore, dare to offer a couple of examples of how this *theory* of a biblical worldview can be put into *practice*. The world, with its multiple worldviews, has so seriously infected our thinking that we no longer think, react, and choose biblically. I know this might "rattle a few cages," but I also believe that such a reaction will prove the point all the more. If we really think, react, and choose biblically, if we really view the world through the lens of Scripture, we will recognize each issue for what it is.

With that in mind, there is a whole gamut of things we could examine, but here are just two that will illustrate how we should put this principle into practice.

First, modern psychology immediately comes to mind. Now, we are not referring here to true *biblical* counseling, which relies on Scripture *alone* for diagnosis and remedy. Rather we are talking about the man-centered, humanistic philosophy that underlies modern thought. There are few things in today's world, in fact, that are as openly anti-God and anti-Scripture as this, but still Christianity has bought into it. Oh, many have tried to sanitize and Christianize it by sprinkling it with Bible verses, but that does not change its underlying philosophy. There is no better illustration than one of the core emphases of modern psychology, namely, the centrality of "self-esteem," a philosophy diametrically opposed to Scripture (Mk. 8:34; Rom. 1:25; 12:3; Phil. 2:3; 2 Tim. 3:1–2; Jas. 4:6; etc.).

In an eye-opening article that appeared in several newspapers, including conservative weekly *The Washington Times*, well-known *secular* psychologist, parenting expert, and syndicated columnist John Rosemond reveals the facts about "self-esteem." He first describes how this approach was hatched back in the 1960s, "that high self-esteem is a good thing and parents should do all in their power to make sure their children acquire it." It didn't matter, he goes on to say, that there was "absolutely no empirical evidence . . . to support this claim," but that it "sounded good" and "was easy to market."

Rosemond then goes on to show that the real evidence

is now in. “People with high self-regard, the evidence says, possess low regard for others . . . seek to manipulate others . . . [and] tend to antisocial behavior. People incarcerated in maximum security prisons have very high self-regard, for example.” He then convincingly submits, “Self-esteem doesn’t pass the common-sense test either. Would you rather be employed by, work alongside, be close friends with or be married to a person with high self-esteem or a person who is humble and modest? See what I mean?”⁷

The underlying philosophy of Scripture, however, is not *self-esteem*, but *Christ-esteem*. When the church as a whole swallowed the self-esteem bait hook, line, and sinker—along with all the accompanying trappings of psychology—it jettisoned a biblical worldview. How did Jesus or Paul minister effectively without such modern thinking? On the contrary, they used Scripture alone. Any compromise with modern psychology immediately and fundamentally denies the sufficiency of Scripture. The two are oil and water. Psychology, like philosophy, has no answers, only more questions. God alone has the answers. Biblical Counseling—which is one of the responsibilities of a pastor as he shepherds the flock—is essential, but when we mix it with humanistic thought, we have abandoned a biblical worldview.

Second, as alluded to earlier, most of today’s church ministry is clearly not based upon a biblical worldview. It is, in fact, based upon several other worldviews, depending upon which false teacher you listen to.

Today’s prosperity teachers are a prime example. They tell us that if we give to God (which means, of course, sending your money to the teacher himself), God will return our “investment” and make us rich. Such teaching is built upon a materialistic worldview.

Another example is the “seeker-sensitive” movement, which appeals to people’s “felt needs.” A “felt need” is simply anything a person *perceives* as a need, regardless of what the *real* need is, which is always truth. “Seekers” are also referred to as the “unchurched” and are appealed to through entertainment and other fleshly methods. While it might seem a little harsh to say so, it is an inescapable conclusion that this reflects a hedonistic worldview.

Another graphic example is that of the Emergent Church movement, which rejects all certainty. It dismisses the possibility of a sure and settled knowledge of truth. In fact, to say that we can know anything for sure is actually arrogant to Emergent leaders, who are obviously deeply committed to a relativistic worldview.

So, as is unambiguously clear, not one of those things, or others we could list, is committed solely and exclusively to Scripture. Their proponents do not think, react, and choose biblically, and it is this that is at the root of the problems in the church today.

A Final Encouragement

There are certainly many other things we could exam-

ine, and we could even do so in a series of articles. It might be better, however, to just leave the matter here and allow each of us to examine other things on our own. The first essential, as we’ve seen, must be to recognize that all such issues go far beyond just “proof texts,” that such things are not just “up for grabs” and open to each person’s opinion or preference. To have a biblical worldview means that the whole of Scripture—its precepts, precedents, and principles—weighs in on every subject.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, this subject has been bothering me for quite awhile, for I fear that instead of a *biblical worldview*, many have a *worldly biblical view*; that is, instead of approaching everything in life through the lens of Scripture, they approach Scripture through the lens of the world. Or to say it another way, instead of Scripture molding their thinking toward the world, they force Scripture to conform to the image of the world. We all will be guilty of this at some time or another, so it calls for vigilance and courage.

Let us each, therefore, ask ourselves a few probing questions: Is my claim of a biblical worldview a *reality* or just *rhetoric*? Do I really have a biblical worldview, or have I combined it with elements of one or more other views? Do I have instead a “worldly biblical” view? Have I truly **hid** God’s **Word** in my entire being for the purpose of shielding me from any of the world’s views and the consequences of those views? Are the first words that form in my mind when any attitude, action, issue, subject, question, or problem (in short, *anything*) arises, “What saith the Scripture?” (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 4:30).⁸ As Schaeffer challenges us:

As Christians we are not only to know the right world view, the world view that tells us the truth of what is, but consciously to act upon that worldview so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life.⁹

Dr. J. D. Watson
Pastor-Teacher
Grace Bible Church

NOTES

¹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog* (InterVarsity), 15–16.

² http://www.theologicalstudies.org/christian_worldview.html

³ Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 19 (emphasis in the original).

⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 295 (emphasis added).

⁵ *The Treasury of David* (Ps. 119:11, emphasis added).

⁶ See TOTT #41 (“What Does ‘New Creature’ Mean?”) for a fuller exposition of this verse and examination of this issue.

⁷ <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/apr/12/rosemond-high-self-esteem-for-kids-a-sham/>

⁸ Other related TOTT articles: #8, 9, 10, and 17.

⁹ Schaeffer, 256.

A *Biblical Worldview*, created by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit and the justifying work of Christ, views, understands, and approaches everything in life through the lens of Scripture, that Scripture alone *defines* reality, *delineates* truth, and *dictates* our attitudes and actions.

 **ANNOUNCING** 

***Truth On Tough Texts: Expositions of
Challenging Scripture Passages (The Book)***

Over the last couple of years, several readers of our monthly offerings in TOTT have commented that these studies should be in a book. Such a book would not only have a wider readership but would also serve as a handy reference to those “tough texts” of Scripture we have examined over the last six years.

Well, after much prayer and thought, we would like to announce that very reality:

***Truth On Tough Texts: Expositions of Challenging
Scripture Passages***

After pitching this idea to a couple of publishers, however, we have decided to publish this independently. Commercial publishers are extremely particular about what they publish and freely “cut and slash” as they will. I have experienced this firsthand in the two books I have published in this arena. So, by publishing this ourselves—and we have formed Sola Scriptura Publications to accomplish this—we can control exactly what is printed, just as the articles originally appeared.

This 500+ page, 6" x 9" format book includes all but five of the 75 articles (including this issue and the next issue) that have appeared in TOTT since its launch in August 2005 (Issues 60–62 and 64 on the Five Solas and Church History are not included because an expanded book on this subject is planned; Issue 67 on the Top Ten Books is also omitted). To make it even more useful as a reference, it also includes comprehensive indexes: subject, author, and Scripture, as well as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words. While we originally considered two volumes, we discovered that a single larger volume would be more cost effective. It is now in editing and planned for release in the first quarter of 2012.

To accomplish this, however, finances are needed. Now, we are *not* asking for *donations*; rather, we are asking for *advanced sales*. By purchasing copies in advance, you can help us expedite this project. It is our hope, in fact, that this project will build a foundation for publishing several other works that are waiting in the wings. One, for example, is a short book titled: *The Doctrines of Grace from the Lips of our Lord: A Study in the Gospel of John*.

So, whether you order one copy or several, your order will be shipped to you (*postage paid*) as soon as the book is published. We are trying hard to make this as cost effective as possible. So, while it will also be available on Amazon.com (including Kindle), here is the better pricing schedule directly from us (dealer inquiries welcome):

- Single Copy: \$25.00
- 2–10 copies: \$23.00 ea. (8% discount)
- 11–20 copies: \$21.00 ea. (16%)
- 21 or more: \$20.00 ea. (20%)

Send your order (check or MO), along with your mailing address (and an email address if you would like to be updated on progress) to (we never sell addresses):

Sola Scriptura Publications
P.O. Box 235
Meeker, CO 81641

We would also ask you to pray for this endeavor. We are excited about this project and hope you will join in the anticipation of what God will do through it. The goal of TOTT remains the same: to further God’s wondrous Word and deepen the knowledge of God’s people in it.

In the next issue: *The Lord’s Supper: Memorial or More* (also included in the new book)