

Amy Orr-Ewing, Understanding Worldview

Well it's wonderful to be here this evening, and we're exploring this subject together of worldview, what is a worldview? How we as Christians navigate this world, we find ourselves in and become awake and intelligent to the cultural landscape around us. So, and we're gonna spend the next 20 minutes looking at four questions together. And the first question is what is a worldview?

Well, the word itself suggests to us that it just means really an overall view of the world, but it's not referring to our physical perspective of landscapes around us. It's talking about our philosophical view, the all-encompassing perspective that we bring to everything that matters in life. Our worldview is a bit like a pair of glasses that we wear so that we see everything through those glasses. And that worldview might clarify and explain the data around us. N.T. Wright describes worldview as "the lenses through which society looks at the world. "The grid upon which are plotted "the multiple experiences of life."

So, a person's worldview represents really their deepest beliefs and assumptions about life. It reflects how an individual or even a society might begin to answer those all-important human questions about existence. Questions about what we are. Questions about where we came from, why we're here, what might make us happy in life? Where, if anywhere, we're headed. The question of whether there is meaning or purpose or direction to life. Questions about an afterlife. Is there anything beyond this life?

Now it seems pretty rare to me that the average person consciously or intentionally thinks through those kinds of issues in any real depth. And in fact, people rarely have a kind of systematic approach to those questions. Actually, a worldview, a person's worldview more often tends to be an evolving set of assumptions that will at least incline them towards certain kinds of intuitions and decisions, and away from others. Our worldview shapes and informs our access to the world around us. And it's really the means by which we interpret the data of our observations, our experiences, and our beliefs.

So, like those glasses N.T. Wright spoke about, it might be like wearing a pair of coloured lenses that we put on. And that colour in those lenses is going to affect, it's gonna colour how we see things. And it might shape or help us see more clearly things. But it might also de-emphasize or distort certain things, or actually prevent us from seeing certain things at all. So, worldviews will determine the specifics, often, of people's opinions about all kinds of things from ethics to politics. They play a really central role in shaping our lives, shaping what we believe and how we condition our thoughts and actions. So, worldviews are very individual, but they're also held off at a group level, society levels as well.

So, I wanna just give you a few headlines about a number of worldviews that people in the west classically will hold. The first would be naturalism. That's the worldview that there is no god, that human beings are just highly evolved animals. That the universe is a closed physical system. And that material things, things that can be tested and touched and shaped, matter is all there is, there is no other dimension to life.

Post-modernism would be another worldview and that worldview tells us that there are no objective standards. Moral or standards of truth. Reality is really shaped by human social construction. And the relationships between human beings and ideas really are all about power. People taking power over other people. And once we understand that, post modernism tells us, we're gonna be able to navigate the world around us.

Another worldview might be pantheism. This comes from the east, but it's grown traction in the west. And pan just means all, theism, god. It means that the worldview tells us that all there is, is gods. So, everyone, you, me, this microphone, all of reality is divine by nature.

A fourth worldview we might interact with regularly would be relativism. That tells us that the different world religions and alongside atheism, represent equally valid perspectives on ultimate reality. No one of them is truer than another. All truth claims are really personal. And thus, equally valid or really invalid.

A fifth worldview we might encounter out there would be what's come to be known as moralistic therapeutic deism. And that tells us that there is a god, but it's not really a personal god, this god force wants us to be happy and there's a general atmosphere of niceness around him or it, this god intervenes in our affairs only when we need him to help us out, and it's surrounded by this cloud of general positivity.

Now people rarely question their own worldview. Worldview is about our deepest intuitions and assumptions that we just pick up. In fact, the questions people tend to ask arise out of or because of their worldview. And so many people will actually struggle to question the basis of their own worldview. And they well be unaware that they even have one. And two good questions I think we can ask. When we meet people and when we interact with worldview around us. Questions that we need to ask of others as well of ourselves are this: is my worldview accurate and/or true? Is there a basis for this pair of spectacles I'm wearing? And secondly, is it good? Is it true? And is it good?

We can take naturalism, the idea that all there is physical matter and everything around us can be explained by and reduced to natural phenomenon. We ask ourselves the question, is that actually true? Are apparently metaphysical things like thoughts, love, ideas, language, are those things physical? Are they biochemical? Or is there actually evidence that those metaphysical things can't be reduced to many physical categories? And they might point to a transcendent source for and a transcendent dimension, too, life. Is naturalism true?

Second question, is it good? Does this worldview lead to flourishing? Does it affirm the dignity of humanity? Can it account for the value of the weak as well as the value of the strong? There are lots of questions. We might take relativism, the worldview that all the different world religions and atheism represent equally valid perspectives on ultimate reality. And all truth claims are personal, and thus equally valid. We ask ourselves the question, is that true? Can it be true that contradictory things are both correct? The idea that God does exist or that he does not exist? Would we accept that in any other sphere of life? Does it matter, for example, whether someone

believes the world is round or flat? Does it matter if the law of gravity applies or does not apply? Why would we accept contradictory thinking when it comes to God and philosophy, and meaning and purpose when we won't accept it in other spheres of life? Can relativism really account for the world as it actually is?

Now of course Christian faith is also a worldview, a foundation for life, as well as a whole way of seeing the world. And Christians might be able to hope to show that a good argument can be made for this worldview being both true and good. True in the sense that it reflects reality as we see it. There's both a physical and a metaphysical dimension to life. Christian faith, of course, makes historical truth claims that can be checked and tested and verified and scrutinized. We can draw conclusions about whether it's a warranted worldview or not. And then we can ask the question, is it good? Does it account for human dignity and freedom? Is there hope? Is there redemption as well as realism about sin? So, worldview is important. That's question number one, what is it?

Question number two, what are some of the core values of today's world and how does the culture shape society's worldview? So, we've run through very briefly a menu of options, we didn't even mention other alternative theisms like Islam, for example, which would be very much alive and well in the west. There are these worldviews that people hold to.

But alongside those worldviews that we're gonna interact with in the workplace and in our neighbourhoods and culture. There are also these powerful memes that both shape and react to prevalent worldviews in our contexts. And I think that perhaps they're worth exploring together, and I wanna briefly look at three.

The first one is this, what I call the meme of heroes and villains. So, from the 1950s to the 1980s, the heroes of western culture, of books and films and public office, those heroes were strong, clean cut, and overwhelmingly good. Villains were narcissistic, unfaithful, broken and selfish. And when we look back, the world seemed to be a bit of a simpler place. But since the 1990s, things have begun to shift. And this is both reflective of and reinforcing of cultural change. One person's hero is another person's villain. And in reality, almost every hero that you are exposed to in the media is in some way an antihero.

The antihero is the character who doesn't have the traditional qualities of the old school admirable leading man or lady. He or she lacks courage and kindness and integrity and moral goodness. These are characters with flaws and the audience are drawn into rooting for someone who is violating everything we've ever known or believed to be right. We track with these characters through their journey and we see their quest for fame and fortune and love. Those common pursuits of human beings. And the selfishness that comes with attaining those goals is no longer airbrushed out. Heroes betray, they cheat, and they fail along with the rest of the human race.

Why do we love them? What's going on in our culture and the worldview around us that we find ourselves rooting for people who steal and lie and cheat? People who betray their lovers, alienate their friends, get even at any cost; what does this say about our worldview? What is this reinforcing in people's worldview? And what opportunity does it give us as Christians for a point of connection with the Christian

story? Of course, we do live in an age of brokenness, of corruption, of abuse and it seems like people want to see real people, people like me, people with flaws and questionable morals. The brokenness of humanity is also an opportunity because a worldview that offers explanation for the fallenness of the world, as well as hope, the hope of redemption in this real fallen world that we all experience is an amazing point of potential contact.

Second meme that I think is probably even more powerful is the meme of victims and perpetrators. In our culture, this idea of the victim and the perpetrator has arisen from that desire to resist misogyny, to resist the abusive of people in power, to resist the abuse of imperialism or racism, the negatives, the ills that we've seen in society. But it has evolved into a wider victimhood as a trump card in any discussion. Now post-modernism alerted western culture to the power dynamics of language and text and hierarchy, but now victim status is being accorded to anyone who experiences any kind of challenge whatsoever. In other words, if you disagree with me, if you challenge me, you're a hater. You're a perpetrator of abuse.

The independent newspaper reported in June 2017 that this is happening a lot in universities. This idea of the safe space. And these policies are leading to academics being afraid to speak their minds for fear of losing their jobs. Policies of safe space and no platforming typically put in place by well-meaning student unions who wanted to avoid discrimination or protect people from language that they might find offensive, have led to a pretty fraught debate in the last two years with a number of high-profile people. People like the feminist writer Germaine Greer. Or the human rights activist Peter Tatchell being de-platformed and not asked not to appear at events for fear that their opinions may be upsetting.

Mr. Hayes, the director of Academics for Academic Freedom says, "There's so many things that could be discussed that you dare not say. So now when you go to university, "you learn what not to say." Now of course the abuse and vile comments thrown around on social media that we all know about are truly hateful, often. But this wider reaction of de platforming people because their ideas differ from mine and accusing anyone who disagrees with me of hate speech is a worrying trend. And it's a powerful meme influenced by the post-modern worldview drawing on those observations about power. But it needs to be challenged, that meme of victim and perpetrator.

And then the third one, being neutral or being biased. A final meme worth exploring is this idea that some people are rigorous, scientific, reasonable, rational and basically neutral. While others are superstitious and biased since they bring their faith to bear on everything. Now this is a curious outworking of both naturalism and relativism working together. So that while faith communities might be lorded for their good works, they're constantly shown to be or recognized by many people to be biased. Now some will call this the myth of religious neutrality, since of course atheism, naturalism, relativism, post-modernism are worldviews. As much as any believer in God or Christian or a Muslim or a pantheist might be, everyone has a worldview. So, to some extent, everyone is biased. And so, every worldview should be equally open to scrutiny.

Okay, third question, that's moving on quickly. What is a biblical worldview? And how might we go about displaying this in our leadership? In the spheres of influence that God has called us into, and this is a massive question, I just want to offer a few headlines. Firstly, a Christian worldview advocates for creation. Life has a purposeful, loving, rational origin. God actually exists and he's the source of life both metaphysical and physical, and that has implications. The implication of that is that the weak need to be honoured and protected by the strong. Since life has transcendent source, human life, as well as the natural environment around us need to be loved, honoured, protected, and we have good reason for those instincts.

Secondly a Christian worldview recognizes that a fall has happened, that things are not as they should be. That human beings have used our freedom for good as well as for ill. A Christian worldview is realistic about sin, pain and death, and it does not and should not hide from or cover up or collude with evil, abuse or darkness.

Thirdly, a Christian worldview clings to the promise and the reality of redemption. Because God entered our world in Jesus Christ and sacrificially dealt with the sin of the world. Jesus offers people redemption and new life. But what does that mean? That means change is possible. A clean slate, a fresh start, actual transformation of the human heart by God, are real possibilities; we're not trapped in hopelessness and cycles of hopelessness. Jesus' resurrection shows us that death isn't the end, redemption.

And fourthly, hope. The idea that all will be set right. A Christian worldview promises that this is not all there is, there is hope beyond the grave and there is justice beyond the grave.

So finally, and in conclusion, how do we maintain, how do we hold onto a commitment to a biblical worldview in this world swirling with rival worldviews and all these memes that are shaping how we think and see things? Well the first thing I would encourage us to do is to notice, to understand and to resist conflicting pressure all around us. Don't just zoom through life, assuming that what you're reading, what you're watching, the conversation that you're having, even the education system shaping your children, that that's in some way neutral. Notice the rival worldviews, notice and learn how to resist.

And then secondly, actively put on, dwell on, factor into your decision-making biblical values. Biblical values like creation, which mean that you affirm the value of all human beings, the weak as well as the strong. As well as the natural environment; make radical decisions in line with that, live as if you believe that life has a transcendent source. Make policies, make decisions in line with that truth that life has a transcendent source. Well what about the fall? Well, practically how can we put on a biblical worldview? Well the fall means that we can be realistic about sin and pain and death. A practical outworking of that might be that when people reveal abuse that has happened to them, we actually believe them. We resolve to stand with them, we're prepared to own the brokenness in our own lives. To say sorry, to own up to sin, to factor into our decision-making the tendency towards selfishness, the tendency towards sin in every human heart.

Thirdly, redemption. How do we put that on? How do we put that aspect of a biblical worldview on? Well we might offer people forgiveness and a new start ourselves. We might model not holding onto grievances, we might model loving our enemies, we might create workplaces and contexts where we lead, redemption is possible. Forgiveness happens, people are rehabilitated. And we live as if material things are not all that there is.

And then lastly, we might put on hope, dwell on, hold onto, and hold out hope. That things do not always have to be as they currently are. We can be leaders that press into hope.

So, what is a worldview? It's that overarching set of spectacles everyone has one.

What are some of the challenges we face? We're facing these memes of victim and perpetrator, heroes and villains, the neutral and the biased.

What's a biblical worldview? Creation, fall, redemption, hope.

And how do we hold onto it? Well, we both resist as well as actively putting on the biblical worldview.

Thank you for listening.

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