
A Passion for God's Word

10

Establishing a Biblical Worldview

One of the principal reasons for consistent study of the Bible is to establish a biblical worldview – a strong and comprehensive worldview in line with the teachings of God's Word. In this final lesson of Module 101, we look at how God seeks to establish this worldview. But first, an important question: What exactly is a worldview?

A worldview is a *perceptual filter* through which you see life. It is a *collection of beliefs and values* (whether consciously understood or not) which shapes the way you view the world around you and dictates the way you respond to life's opportunities and obstacles.

Every single person needs a focus for life. Without a set of reference points, it is impossible to make sense of life's circumstances. It is a person's worldview that provides this frame of reference.

Whether we know it or not, we all have a worldview. In this study, we will put our own worldview under the microscope to see if it lines up with God's Word.

Worldviews vary widely from person to person and from culture to culture. But from God's perspective, there are only two types of worldview:

- A cultural worldview
- A biblical worldview

Let's examine both types of worldview.

A Cultural Worldview

If you've grown up in a country which calls itself Christian, you may think that you automatically have a biblical worldview. But this is *never* the case. Let's look at the reason why.

Read Genesis 3:1-6

This was the beginning of life outside the parameters God had set for “life and godliness.” Ever since that fateful day, a bias has entered into human thinking, a bias that draws him away from God’s thinking.

Read Proverbs 3:7

At the root of Adam and Eve’s sin was their desire to become “wise in [their] own eyes.” This propensity to set oneself up as the arbiter of right and wrong outside of the umbrella of God’s guidance lies at the core of every non-biblical worldview. George Barna, in his book *The Second Coming of the Church*, addresses American cultural worldviews in particular, but his words have a bearing on most Western worldviews.

“...the spirituality of Americans is Christian in name only. We desire experience rather than truths. We seek comfort rather than growth. Faith must come on our own terms or we reject it. We have enthroned ourselves as the final arbiters of righteousness, the ultimate rulers of our own experience and destiny. We are the Pharisees of the new millennium.”¹

These are strong words, but true. The average Christian’s worldview is often biblical in name only. Just because your worldview has a sprinkling of biblical terms and concepts does not mean that it is biblical. A parrot may meow, but that does not make it a cat.

Read Colossians 1:21

Read Romans 8:7

The Bible couches the issue of a person’s mindset in the strongest of terms. The verses you read above speak of people being “enemies [of God] in their minds” and their minds being “hostile to God” (see also **Romans 5:10**). Either a person’s thinking is aligned with God’s thinking or it is opposed to God’s thinking. There is no in-between.

Read Philippians 3:17-19

In **Colossians 1:21**, Paul spoke of the condition of your mind *before* you came to know Christ. Now Paul extends this condition of being God’s enemy to some Christians who, he says, have become enemies of the Cross because “[t]heir mind is on earthly things.”

This is serious business. If God expresses himself so strongly about a mindset opposed to him, we should not take this lightly. It is therefore absolutely vital for a Christian to be able to distinguish between a biblical worldview and a cultural worldview – whether that be a cultural American worldview, a cultural European worldview, a cultural African worldview, or any other cultural mindset. George Barna writes:

“The Bible instructs us to approach God with fear and trembling, befitting our awe at His majesty and love, focusing on who He is, what He has done, and what He expects of us; [modern] culture encourages us to treat God as an

equity partner focused on our personal development. Scripture mandates that we seek and embrace God's truth; [modern] culture exhorts us to achieve refreshment through a variety of experiences."²

Understanding how such a worldview arises is a major step forward in understanding how to avoid that worldview. So let's examine for a moment how a cultural worldview is formed.

The Shaping of a Cultural Worldview

A cultural worldview is, simply put, any worldview that has been shaped by the surrounding culture. The research of George Barna, a demographic and marketing research specialist, suggests that "most people's worldview is little more than a collection of fragmented ideals mindlessly adopted from pop culture."³

A cultural worldview is shaped by powerful forces in the world around us. The five principal forces are:

- **Family** – One's family, particularly in the early years of childhood, is the primary shaper of one's worldview. Children watch how their parents talk and act. Their parents' philosophy and worldview tends to be absorbed by osmosis.* Assumptions and prejudices are taken on board without thinking and often form the foundation of the child's worldview.† A self-image, whether positive or negative, is also shaped in the family environment.
- **School** – Our educational system is also a primary moulder of a child's worldview, and this influence carries over strongly into college and university. This is one of the reasons why, as Christian parents, we should never abdicate our role as the primary shapers of our children's worldview by passing off this responsibility to our schools (whether the school be Bible-based or not).
- **Friends** – Our friends exert an incredible influence on our minds, shaping disparate worldviews into a commonly held worldview. There is a conforming influence at work. This is why the Bible says: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 **Corinthians 15:33**).
- **Media** – In today's society, the mass media (internet, television, radio, movies, newspapers, magazines, books and other publications) don't just inform and entertain. They also shape worldviews. Most people's worldviews are, in fact, an eclectic mix of assumptions drawn from the books they read, popular psychology as espoused in the magazines they buy, and the philosophical mindset upon which their favorite television programs are based. Beware: the fictional heroes and heroines we enjoy watching, whether they be in *Friends*, *Star Trek* or *The Days of Our Lives*

* Osmosis describes the passive absorption of ideas and attitudes from those around you.

† Remember: Our worldview is not just the way we *look* at life, but also the basis for how we *act* and *react* to life's circumstances. Thoughts always flow into words and to actions (see **Matthew 12:33-35**).

The Prime Purpose

At the core of any worldview is what could be called the Prime Purpose. What do you see as the Prime Purpose for your life?

Different people see different things as their Prime Purpose:

- To live a fulfilling life
- To acquire more wealth
- To raise a family
- To serve others

The list is long, but whatever the Prime Purpose may be, this will drive your life.

A biblical worldview, on the other hand, is founded up a very clear Prime Purpose:

- To know God and to make him known

This is the starting point. Out of this Prime Purpose flows everything else. If you are driven by a hunger to know God and make him know, you can be sure that the foundation of your worldview is biblical.

exert a powerful influence to shape our worldview.

➤ **Music** – Few people appreciate the power that music holds to shape our thinking. The songs we listen to and sing are not just nice melodies or meaningful lyrics. They are a subtle form of brainwashing.* In our generation, music has become a cross-cultural, international medium. There has emerged in the last ten years in particular a global youth culture based on music. No matter where you go in the world, the youth tend to conform to one global worldview. Never underestimate the power of music to shape one’s worldview for good or for bad.

All five forces come together to create a cultural lens through which most people around us view their lives and the circumstances they face. This cultural lens is a worldview which the Bible says is “corrupted.” Self-destruction and alienation from God is built into this mindset.

Do you remember reading **2 Peter 1:3-4** in Lesson 101-06? Look the scripture up again, just to refresh your memory. We saw in this passage how the Lord has a dual objective for your life: 1) for you to “participate in the divine nature,” and 2) for you to “escape the corruption in the world.” You can be sure that conforming to the likeness of Christ (**Romans 8:29**) and *not* conforming to the pattern of this world (**Romans 12:2**) lies at the core of a truly biblical worldview. And there is only one way to *not* be conformed to this world and that it is to be conformed to *another* pattern: the pattern of God’s Word.

Read Acts 2:40

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Church was born, Peter “warned...and pleaded with” the new believers with these words: “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” How those first believers responded to Peter’s plea provides us with clues to how God goes about conforming our worldview to his own.

* Brainwashing carries with it a very negative connotation and is usually associated with severe forms of mind control practised by interrogators or cults. However, “soft” brainwashing happens all around us all the time. The mass media is a brainwashing mechanism, shaping the thoughts and attitudes of the populace and conforming them to the value systems of those who run the media. Lyrics too have a brainwashing effect. Prolonged exposure to any genre of music with lyrics will tend to conform the listener, for good or for bad, to the value system and worldview of the songs’ writers.

The Shaping of a Biblical Worldview

In your study in Ephesians this morning, you read a verse which described the corrupting influence of the world. Let's take another look at that passage.

Read again Ephesians 4:22-24

Note how, in verse 23, Paul speaks of being “made new in the attitude of your minds.” This transformation of your thinking processes is what establishing a biblical worldview is all about. On the Day of Pentecost, when the believers responded to Peter's message, they began an active commitment to four things. In these four things we see the elements that shape a biblical worldview.

Read Acts 2:42

Those first believers “devoted themselves” to:

- **The apostles' teaching** – *They consistently came under the instruction of God's Word.* To them, the apostles' teaching was something much more than just a sermon to be heard. It was something that multiplied through their lives to touch others around them – a Word not just taught but also expressed in power (see [Acts 2:43; 4:33; 19:20](#)).
- **Fellowship** – *They consistently met together in fellowship and worship.* To them, fellowship was much more than just “getting together.” It was a common concern expressed also in practical acts of giving and sacrifice (see [Acts 2:44-45; 4:32,34-35](#)).
- **The breaking of bread** – *They consistently applied the terms of the New Covenant to family life.* To them, the breaking of bread was much more than just having Communion on a Sunday. The “breaking of bread” was done “in their homes” (see [Acts 2:46](#)). This double level of church life – meeting together *as a church* and meeting *from house to house* (see [Acts 5:42](#)) – is seen right throughout the book of Acts.
- **Prayer** – *They consistently met together for prayer.* To them, prayer was not a separate activity or meeting, but a daily lifestyle connected to their mission to evangelize the world (see [Acts 4:24-31; 13:2-3](#)). Prayer is what brings a Christian into contact with the heartbeat of God for our generation.

These four activities, consistently applied to your life, will shape your worldview into a biblical worldview. Through regular exposure and participation in biblical teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer, God will align your thinking and lifestyle to his Word. You will then begin to see life from God's perspective – seeing your life through God's eyes, so to speak. This is what it means to have a biblical worldview. Your thoughts, words and actions reflect the priorities of God and the principles of his Word.

The Lure of Syncretism

Syncretism is a blending of worldly views with biblical views. Syncretism has always been at work in the history of the Church, a tool of the Enemy who is seeking to erode the power and purity of the Gospel message. But in our generation, it is taking on a new force. For syncretism lies at the heart of the global cultural worldview which is emerging today. You take ideas that you like and discard that which you don't. This is a seductive view. As George Barna explains:

“One of the chief struggles facing the Christian Church in the days ahead will be to persuade people that the blending of disparate religious beliefs and practices into a customized, impure version of Christianity is illegitimate.”⁴

The worldwide trend today is the encouragement of the individual to create a “personalized spirituality.” Shop around, see what you like, blend it all together to produce a religious worldview that is uniquely “you.” This “you-centered” trend has had a noticeable impact on the Church too.

- We tend to define success in the same way that the world defines success. The business principles used in the world are often imported without modification into our personal life strategies.
- We have often become obsessed with formulas to life and ministry, re-packaging popular self-help psychology in biblical terminology.
- We have often become obsessed with the cult of prosperity, a reflection of the cultural values around us.
- We tend to “align [ourselves] with values that give [us] control. We don't want anyone telling us what, why, how, where, or when to do anything.”⁵
- We have often succumbed to a feelings-oriented approach to God and a “feel-good” view of life. “The average Christian assumes that when we are happy, God is happy.”⁶
- We have created a “consumer Christianity,” all packaged neatly so that it doesn't impose too much on our busy schedules.

Without realizing it, we have often fallen into the same trap as the Pharisees. Our acclaim comes from men. Our focus is on earthly things. Is it any wonder that according to a Gallup Poll, “little difference [was seen] between those who go to church and those who don't.”⁷

It has become increasingly difficult to distinguish between “the pattern of this world” (**Romans 12:2**) and the pattern of the Church. Chuck Colson repeatedly expresses a deep concern over this state of affairs:

“The church has bought into the same value system [as the world]: fame, success, materialism and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues. We want to emulate the best-known preach-

ers with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices. Preoccupation with these values has perverted the church's message."⁸

Read Revelation 3:15-20

Note that verse 20 is in fact directed to Christians, not non-Christians. The church at Laodicea had found itself in the incredible situation where Jesus was on the outside, knocking on the door, asking to come in and be a part of their daily lives. Yet they were blind to this condition. The Christian life continued as normal. Church activities were so successful that the church was saying: "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But the Lord was saying to them: "You do not realize...?"

God wants to open our eyes to the reality as he sees it. He is in the business of changing our worldview to match his own. It all begins with you. The Holy Spirit will convict you of anything that doesn't line up to his Word. He will help you to establish:

- ➔ A right view of God
- ➔ A right view of yourself
- ➔ A right view of others
- ➔ A right view of life

Right action flows from a right view of God, of yourself, of others, of life.

Setting Priorities

Ask the average Christian what a biblical priority system should be and the list of ten looks something like this:

- ➔ First Priority: **God**
- ➔ Second Priority: **Others**
- ➔ Last Priority: **Me**

But is this what the Bible teaches? In fact, there are two problems with this list. Firstly, it assumes that God and I are two separate issues, when the Bible says they are not. And secondly, it is not really a workable priority list. What does it really mean to put me at the end of the list?

A better priority list would be as follows:

- ➔ First Priority: **My walk with God**
- ➔ Second Priority: **My family's walk with God**
- ➔ Next Priority: **Serving others**

It's important to understand that this is an oversimplification. But it illustrates the priority of your relationship with God being at the forefront. It is only when you are spiritual healthy and your family is spiritually healthy that you are in a place where you can begin to obey the Lord's command to deny yourself and serve others.

Warning Signs

How can you tell if you have succumbed to a non-biblical worldview? Well, there are a few clues. Go through this checklist and be open for the Lord's voice to speak to you.

You have settled down

Being comfortable with the way things are (in the sense of "settling down") is anathema to the biblical mindset. In the words of Arthur Wallace, a Christian who has settled down into the comforts of life "begins to revert to his old way of thinking..."

“...After all, it is far less demanding, and looking around it seems to him that most Christians have leveled off in a similar manner, and that of course eases his conscience. Ceasing to swim upstream, he starts to drift with the current or to swim just enough to stay where he is and so avoid the epithet *backslider*. For all that, he is a backslider. He has ceased to be an asset to the kingdom of God and has become a liability.”⁹

The world seeks to protect the status quo and there is an inherent message within any cultural worldview “not to rock the boat.” Being comfortable (in the sense of “settling down”) is the enemy of a biblical worldview.

The Word of God calls the believer to rise above the mediocrity of a worldly existence. Someone once described it this way: “I’m satisfied with a dissatisfied satisfaction.” It is this “dissatisfied satisfaction” that spurs the Christian forward .

God has not called you to be comfortable, but obedient. Jesus is always moving, and, if we are to follow him, we must be keeping pace with him.

We’re not saying that you need to feel guilty if you are enjoying time with your family or friends. Enjoying life is actually a key attribute of a genuinely biblical worldview. There is, however, no “settling down” for Christian. We are “aliens and strangers” in the world (1 Peter 1:17; 2:11; Hebrews 11:13). This sense of temporary residence is a key component to a biblical worldview.

You have compartmentalized your life

We live a world where time is counted as a commodity to be protected. We thus carve up our daily and weekly lives into clear compartments in order to maximize our fulfilment and comfort. This, however, can lead to a lifestyle which relegates the Lord to specific times of the day or week, leaving the rest of our schedule “free for me.”

The biblical worldview is starkly different. As we discover in God’s Word, God does not sit quietly in one compartment of your life. He demands a total devotion. Your whole life belongs to him. Your whole day is his.

As someone once phrased it: “God is Lord of all, or not at all.”

You are not persecuted

Persecution is like a barometer that shows how closely our lives are aligned to the world’s viewpoint.

Read 2 Timothy 3:12

Now we don’t need to go looking for persecution, of course. If we follow Jesus, persecution will come looking for us. While not a pleasant experience, persecution is usually a good sign that we are keeping pace with Jesus.

Read Matthew 5:11-12

Read Luke 6:22-23,26

You are not accountable to anyone

God has called the Christian into an accountable lifestyle. This is one of the purposes of fellowship. It is possible, however, to “attend” church but never participate in church life. As we progress through the Online Bible College, we will continue to encourage you to be in an accountable relationship with the leadership of your church.

The positive expression of each of these items listed above is the foundation of a truly biblical worldview:

- We are consistently moving forward in Christ
- We have a wholistic view of our life with God
- We embrace persecution as part of the privilege of following Christ
- We enjoy an accountable relationship and ministry within our church

Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-6

The Bible doesn’t pull any punches when it comes to your worldview. It actually uses military terminology. The Bible views the changing of the church’s worldview as an act of war.

God has declared war on the world’s mindset. But that war begins in the church and is directed against those “people who think that we live by the standards of this world.” God targets mental strongholds – what Paul calls “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” And what weapon is it that has “divine power to demolish” these strongholds? God’s weapon is the “living and active” Word of God (**Hebrews 4:12**).

As Eugene Peterson so eloquently renders **2 Corinthians 10:5-6**:

“We use our God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.”

Read Philippians 3:12-16

Note also Philippians 3:17-4:1

It’s important not to fall into the trap of trying to change yourself. God’s first priority is to change your worldview. When your thinking becomes aligned with his thinking, you will then find that God’s action to conform you to the likeness of his Son will be a natural outworking of your walk with him.

But if the Holy Spirit is convicting you, take heart! The Word of God is designed not only for instructing and training in righteousness, but also for rebuking and correcting (**2 Timothy 3:16**). Both his rod (a shepherd’s instrument of discipline and *rebuke*) and his staff (a shepherd’s instrument of guidance and *correction*) comfort us (see **Psalms 23:4**).

Read Hebrews 12:5-6

God's discipline is actually an expression of his love. When we feel the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, be encouraged – firstly, because this is an expression of God's deep love for you; and secondly, because your heart is open enough and soft enough for you to feel the gentle tug of his conviction.

As Eugene Peterson's *The Message* expresses **Hebrews 12:5-6**:

“My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects.”

Becoming a Radical Christian

As you read the Gospel accounts you will discover an emerging picture of Jesus quite different from that portrayed in “Christmas theology.” Yes, Jesus was “meek and mild” (see **Matthew 11:29; 12:15-21**). But he was also aggressive and positively violent when it came to confronting hypocrisy and unrepented sin (see **John 2:13-17; Matthew 23:13-33**).

Jesus was a radical. His teaching was radical, his lifestyle was radical and he placed radical requirements on his disciples. So let's find out exactly what is meant by the word “radical” as it is taught in Scripture.

The English word “radical” comes from the Latin word *radix*, meaning “root.” According to the Oxford Dictionary, to be radical means 1) “going to the root or origin;” 2) “touching or acting upon what is essential and fundamental;” 3) “thorough.”

Arthur Wallis, in his book *The Radical Christian*, makes an observation that lies at the core of a biblical worldview:

“The God of the Bible is radical in his dealings with men. This fact was most clearly and powerfully demonstrated in the life and ministry of his Son, Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is therefore utterly radical in its demands.”¹⁰

God is not wanting surface changes in your life. He doesn't want you simply to change your outward appearance or your vocabulary. He wants to change your heart so radically that it outworks in every aspect of your life.

Read Matthew 3:10

John the Baptist declared that with the coming of Jesus, “the ax is...at the root of the trees.” God's primary action is not to try to change the *fruit* of your life. He first targets the *root* of your life.

“True radicalism is a product of the cross in the life of the believer. It is only as we willingly embrace the cross that the ax is laid to the root of all within us that is opposed to the deep working of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

The key word to radical Christianity, as the Bible teaches it, is the word “total.”

And as we shall see in the next module of study, the Cross of Christ is a *total* provision that produces a *total* experience, requiring *total* obedience and producing *total* conformity to God's thoughts and ways.

If we are to be like Jesus, we need to be radical in our lifestyle. And if we are to think like our Father, our worldview must also be radical.

Starting to Think Like God

The amazing thing about the Christian life is that the standard God has set for you is so high that without his power it is impossible to attain it. And this is the essence of his standard:

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16

Read Matthew 5:48

Do you feel like you're suddenly out of your depth? Good! This is what following Jesus is all about! "Be holy," God says, "as I am holy. Be perfect, as I am perfect." This is so *totally* beyond your capability that it is only by relying on his grace and power that it becomes possible.

This is the essence of a biblical worldview. God has called you *to be like him* – in thought, in word, in action. A cultural worldview (disguised as a Christian one) tries to shape God into the mould of your life. It demands that God involve himself in your life *on your terms*. A biblical worldview, however, is the other way around. God does not and cannot fit into your life. Instead, God shapes you to fit you into *his* life. It is on *his* terms, not your own, that you relate to God.

The Bible has a name for the biblical worldview we've been talking about in this lesson. The name for this worldview is called "the Gospel." In the next module, we will be looking at the Gospel – not just what it is, but how it impacts your life on a day-by-day basis.

Read Romans 16:25-27

God's objective is to "establish you by [the] gospel." When the Lord has truly established a Bible-based, Gospel-focused worldview in his Church, the result will be that "the nations [will] believe and obey."

- ¹ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.23.
- ² George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.20.
- ³ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.59.
- ⁴ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.68.
- ⁵ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.61.
- ⁶ George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), p.123.
- ⁷ Chuck Colson, "Jesus is Lord," *Charisma*, May, 1985.
- ⁸ Chuck Colson, *Loving God*, (Zondervan, 1983), p.14.
- ⁹ Arthur Wallis, *The Radical Christian*, (New Jersey: Fleming H Revell Company, "Power Books," 1981), p.18.
- ¹⁰ Arthur Wallis, *The Radical Christian*, (New Jersey: Fleming H Revell Company, "Power Books," 1981), p.16.
- ¹¹ Arthur Wallis, *The Radical Christian*, (New Jersey: Fleming H Revell Company, "Power Books," 1981), p.11.