



What's a Christian Worldview?

by *Del Tackett*

A recent nationwide survey completed by the Barna Research Group determined that only 4 percent of Americans had a "biblical" worldview. When George Barna, who has researched cultural trends and the Christian Church since 1984, looked at the "born-again" believers in America, the results were a dismal 9 percent.

Barna's survey also connected an individual's worldview with his or her moral beliefs and actions. Barna says, "Although most people own a Bible and know some of its content, our research found that most Americans have little idea how to integrate core biblical principles to form a unified and meaningful response to the challenges and opportunities of life."

1. *What's a worldview?*

A worldview is the framework from which we view reality and make sense of life and the world. "[It's] any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world and man's relations to God and the world," says David Noebel, author of *Understanding the Times*.

For example, a 2-year-old believes he's the center of his world, a secular humanist believes that the material world is all that exists, and a Buddhist believes he can be liberated from suffering by self-purification.

Someone with a biblical worldview believes his primary reason for existence is to love and serve God.

Whether conscious or subconscious, every person has some type of worldview. A personal worldview is a combination of all you believe to be true, and what you believe becomes the driving force behind every emotion, decision and action. Therefore, it affects your response to every area of life: from philosophy to science, theology and anthropology to economics, law, politics, art and social order — everything.

For example, let's suppose you have bought the idea that beauty is in the eye of the beholder (secular relative truth) as opposed to beauty as defined by God's purity and creativity (absolute truth). Then any art piece, no matter how vulgar or abstract, would be considered "art," a creation of beauty.

2. *What's a biblical worldview?*

A biblical worldview is based on the infallible Word of God. When you believe the Bible is entirely true, then you allow it to be the foundation of everything you say and do. That means, for instance, you take seriously the mandate in Romans 13 to honor the governing authorities by researching the candidates and issues, making voting a priority.

Do you have a biblical worldview? Answer the following questions, based on claims found in the Bible and which George Barna used in his survey:

- Do absolute moral truths exist?
- Is absolute truth defined by the Bible?
- Did Jesus Christ live a sinless life?
- Is God the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe, and does He still rule it today?
- Is salvation a gift from God that cannot be earned?
- Is Satan real?
- Does a Christian have a responsibility to share his or her faith in Christ with other people?
- Is the Bible accurate in all of its teachings?

Did you answer yes to these? Only 9 percent of "born-again" believers did. But what's more important than your yes to these questions is whether your life shows it. Granted, we are all sinners and fall short, but most of our gut reactions will reflect what we deep-down, honest-to-goodness believe to be real and true.

3. *How does a biblical worldview get diluted?*

Here is the big problem. Nonbiblical worldview ideas don't just sit in a book somewhere waiting for people to examine them. They bombard us constantly from television, film, music, newspapers, magazines, books and academia.

Because we live in a selfish, fallen world, these ideas seductively appeal to the desires of our flesh, and we often end up incorporating them into our personal worldview. Sadly, we often do this without even knowing it.

For example, most Christians would agree with 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and other Scriptures that command us to avoid sexual immorality, but how often do Christians fall into lust or premarital and extramarital sexual sin? Is it simply because they are weak when tempted, or did it begin much earlier, with the seductive lies from our sexualized society?

4. **Why does a biblical worldview matter?**

If we don't really believe the truth of God and live it, then our witness will be confusing and misleading. Most of us go through life not recognizing that our personal worldviews have been deeply affected by the world. Through the media and other influences, the secularized American view of history, law, politics, science, God and man affects our thinking more than we realize. We then are taken "captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

However, by diligently learning, applying and trusting God's truths in every area of our lives — whether it's watching a movie, communicating with our spouses, raising our children or working at the office — we can begin to develop a deep comprehensive faith that will stand against the unrelenting tide of our culture's nonbiblical ideas. If we capture and embrace more of God's worldview and trust it with unwavering faith, then we begin to make the right decisions and form the appropriate responses to questions on abortion, same-sex marriage, cloning, stem-cell research and even media choices. Because, in the end, it is our decisions and actions that reveal what we really believe.

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

What's Your View of the World?

Everyone has a worldview. But what is it and does it really make a difference?

by *Del Tackett*

When Jimmy Carter became president in 1976 and Charles Colson published his best-selling book that same year, their stories made the phrase "born again" an instant media buzzword.

Originally spoken by Jesus in John 3, the phrase began showing up often. I recall watching a televised golf match in which the announcer declared that the man teeing off had been born again. I was delighted, yet curious to see how he was going to explain this on national TV. He continued, describing how the golfer had merely changed his grip a little and was miraculously "born-again."

We are beginning to see the same thing happen to the term "worldview." I have heard people use it as a synonym for *personality*, as in "She has such a delightful worldview." You have undoubtedly heard it—maybe even used it. But do you know what it means?

What is a Worldview?

Charles Colson says a worldview is "the sum total of our beliefs about the world,"¹ while James Sire says it is our "set of presuppositions ... about the basic makeup of our world."² Webster defines it as "a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world."³ A worldview is something much deeper than your personality or how you hold a golf club. It defines your beliefs about reality and your outlook on life.

In order to better understand the concept, it's important to know that there are two different kinds—or two "levels"—of worldview. Allow me to explain...

Formal Worldviews

A formal worldview is a major system of ideas that orders human hearts and minds. To visualize this, picture a bookshelf with twenty or thirty books on it. Some are old, some are new. Some are thick, others thin. Each book has a title: *Christianity, Islam, Marxism, Pagan Mysticism*, etc.

If you were to study them, you would find that each builds a case that the things it claims are true (its "truth claims") accurately reflect reality. Some are better defined than others, but each one asserts that it has discovered or crafted the real truth about everything important in life. Marxism, for example, basically claims that the secret of life lies in economics and, as a result, reality consists in the clash between those who control the means of production and those who don't.

A formal worldview is usually comprehensive in scope, offering its proponents a lens they can look through to formulate universal beliefs about life, from philosophy to science, from anthropology to politics, from economics to social order.

Personal Worldviews

If we camp out on this definition, we might begin to think that our personal worldviews are in one-to-one relationship with the established formal worldviews. We would be wrong. There is a huge difference between a systematic set of truth claims and the complex, fragmented, and elusive beliefs of most human beings.

If someone claims to be a Marxist, what does that mean? Can we assume that his personal beliefs exactly match the Marxism book on the shelf? Or what if someone claims to be a witch? It's hard to say what that means in terms of her assumptions about life. Likewise, when someone says, "I am a Christian; therefore, I have a Christian worldview," it's not necessarily true.

Late in 2003, pollster George Barna attempted to determine how many Americans held a "biblical worldview."⁴ He asked people questions taken straight from Scripture, to find out if they really believe what is written there.⁵ The results were dismal: Only four

percent do. When he looked at the born-again⁶ believers in America, the results inched up to an anemic nine percent. How can this be? Instead of adopting the formal framework of a biblical worldview, it seems that "Christians" have accepted a hodgepodge of individual truth claims that come from everywhere.

Life on a Smorgasbord

Look back at the bookshelf for a moment. On the end, you will find another, very large book titled *Miscellaneous*. In here we find all of the unconnected truth claims that simply float around our culture. They may be distant cousins or distortions of a formal worldview or unexamined claims that don't at all reflect reality.

For example, if you listen carefully to what people are saying and read between the lines, you will hear this belief: "I am stupid and worthless." Where did that come from? I can think of several "formal" worldviews that give rise to this truth claim, but not directly. People in our culture are perhaps more influenced by these miscellaneous truth claims than by any formal worldview.

So what's wrong with that? To begin with, living with a hodgepodge of unexamined beliefs makes our lives purposeless and fragmented. On top of that, when our beliefs don't accurately represent reality, we end up acting in ways that hurt ourselves and our relationships.

I challenge you to examine your worldview. Do your personal beliefs really come from a biblical framework, or are they collected from various belief systems and your own (perhaps inaccurate) interpretation of reality? If we say that our God, in Jesus, is truth, we would do well to live lives that are based on the truth He has revealed to us in his Word.

¹Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999, p. 14.

²James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (3rd. Ed.). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997, p. 16.

³See "weltanschauung," [Merriam-Webster](#) online.

⁴Barna, George. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life." *The Barna Update*, December 1, 2003.

⁵For the purposes of the research, a biblical worldview was defined as believing that absolute moral truths exist; that such truth is defined by the Bible; and firm belief in six specific religious views. Those views were that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He stills rules it today; salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned; Satan is real; a Christian has a responsibility to share their faith in Christ with other people; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings. See Barna Research.

⁶In Barna Research Group studies, born again Christians are not defined on the basis of characterizing themselves as "born again" but based upon their answers to two questions. The first is "have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?" If the respondent says "yes," then they are asked a follow-up question about life after death. One of the seven perspectives a respondent may choose is "when I die, I will go to Heaven because I have confessed my sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior." Individuals who answer "yes" to the first question and select this statement as their belief about their own salvation are then categorized as "born again."

What's Your Worldview?

What's a worldview? Tracy Munsil explores this question.

by *Tracy F. Munsil*

The scene: The African plain comes alive with the gathering of zebras, gazelles, giraffes, elephants, all the animals on a majestic pilgrimage to see their future king, the cuddly newborn lion cub, Simba. After receiving the blessing of Rafiki, the lion pride's shaman monkey, the animals big and small all bow on bended knee in worship to the uplifted cub. In the background plays the song, "The Circle of Life" - "It's the circle of life/ And it moves us all/ through despair and hope/ Through faith and love/ Till we find our place/ On the path unwinding/ In the circle, the circle of life."

Any parent with children older than about 8 knows the scene described above well, and most can still sing the song. Disney movies are like that -full of wonderfully creative characters, compelling story lines and memorable music. Millions of families across America watched the popular movie *The Lion King* when it came out in 1993, delighting in Simba and the antics of his friends Pumbaa and Timon singing "Hakuna Matata." Pure Disney genius. But what worldview was being absorbed by millions of impressionable preschoolers? Is the concept of the "circle of life" true according to God's Word? Do the ideas in the movie square with the Christian worldview?

Like everything we watch, listen to or read, *The Lion King* contains a worldview. And unless you know what you're looking for, unless you have a strong understanding of your own worldview, it is often difficult to discern.

So what's the worldview in *The Lion King*? Despite a handful of good moral lessons, it is not biblical Christianity. The notion of the "circle of life," that history is circular and the present is heavily influenced by the spirits of one's ancestors, is closer to Eastern pantheism or native spiritualism than the linear view of history presented in the Bible. But how is the average parent to know and discern the worldview, and how can parents equip their children to evaluate worldview for themselves?

WHAT IS WORLDVIEW?

Worldview is the latest buzzword in Christian circles. We're all told we need one, and whether we know it or not, we all have one. But what is a worldview? Literally, of course, worldview is how a person *views the world*. A person's worldview consists of the values, ideas

or the fundamental belief system that determines his attitudes, beliefs and ultimately, actions. Typically, this includes his view of issues such as the nature of God, man, the meaning of life, nature, death, and right and wrong.

We begin developing our worldview as young children, first through interactions within our family, then in social settings such as school and church, and from our companions and life experiences. Increasingly, our media culture is playing a key role in shaping worldview. We are a culture saturated with powerful media images in movies, television, commercials and music. And like the entertaining and seemingly benign Lion King, what we watch, listen to and read, impacts the way we think. Consistently consuming entertainment with false ideas will inevitably distort our view of the world.

Although the Bible never uses the word "worldview," in Colossians 2: 6-8, we are commanded to be able to discern and discard false philosophy-which is essentially worldview. "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 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."

Jeff Baldwin, a fellow at the Texas-based Worldview Academy, says worldview "is like an invisible pair of eyeglasses-glasses you put on to help you see reality clearly. If you choose the right pair of glasses, you can see everything vividly and can behave in sync with the real world. ... But if you choose the wrong pair of glasses, you may find yourself in a worse plight than the blind man - thinking you see clearly when in reality your vision is severely distorted." To choose the "right" glasses, you have to first understand and embrace the true worldview.

WORLDVIEW FOR ADULTS

As an adult, you already have a worldview. The challenge is to formalize it by asking probing questions to help you understand what you believe and why you believe it. During this process, if your thinking is inconsistent with biblical teaching, you can discard the false ideas and replace them with truth. A number of worldview resources are available to help you through this formalizing process. Different resources employ somewhat different approaches, but they all provide foundational answers to the big questions of life.

In my teaching of worldview and Great Books to homeschool students ages 12 to 18, I've used a series of seven questions to help them formalize their own worldview and to help them evaluate competing worldviews. These seven questions are common to many worldview resources and provide an effective tool for adults, as well as teenagers, particularly to evaluate the worldview of books, music and movies:

- Is there a god and what is he like?
- What is the nature and origin of the universe?
- What is the nature and origin of man?
- What happens to man after death?
- Where does knowledge come from?
- What is the basis of ethics and morality?
- What is the meaning of human history?

A similar seven-question approach is found in the excellent worldview resource, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog* by James W Sire, and also in *Worldviews of the Western World*, a three-year worldview and Great Books curriculum for homeschoolers written by David Quine. Chuck Colson's *How Now Shall We Live* uses a four-question approach. It doesn't matter how many questions you use, just that you begin asking the big questions of life in four key areas-deity, origin, nature and rules- and then answer them based on Scripture.

Finding answers using the Bible provides the foundation of the Christian or biblical worldview. For example, someone who holds the biblical worldview would answer the question, "Is there a god and what is he like?" using what he knows to be true about the character of God according to Scripture. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign, personal, infinite, transcendent, just, omniscient, immanent, and good. These attributes are not exhaustive by any means, but do establish the basic character of God. This checklist provides a starting point for identifying false or competing worldviews. Answers to the other questions can be derived from Scripture as well, and are presented in numerous worldview books or works of Christian apologetics.

Once you can answer those questions clearly for yourself based on Scripture, you then can apply them to everything you watch, read or listen to. For example, last year's Academy Award for Best Picture went to the film, *Gladiator*. In answer to "Is there a god in the movie and what is he like?"-there was not only a god, but many gods, which was the prevailing religious view in ancient Rome. In addition, early in the movie, the lead character Maximus sets up a shrine in his tent, and prays to these gods daily to watch over his wife and child. Yet these gods could not offer the true hope of salvation or deliverance through Jesus Christ.

What about the basis of ethics and morality in the movie? It does portray virtue in Maximus' loyalty and devotion to the dying emperor of Rome. Yet his morality and code of ethics is driven by his iron will to survive to avenge the murders of his wife and son. We see that, like Maximus, each character has his or her own set of moral guidelines or ethical agenda, depending on their individual situation. The morality of Maximus' trainer is guided by his greed and desire for notoriety based on his gladiators' performance. He has no ethical problem sending innocent men to a gory, violent death to turn a profit or increase his social standing. Likewise, the Emperor Commodus' sister takes Maximus into her confidence in a plot to avenge his family's slaying, only to betray him later to save her own son. The morality and ethics in the movie are not based on the belief in transcendent truth, as in the biblical worldview, but on what is expedient for each character's circumstances--utilitarianism, or moral relativism. Similarly, the other questions can also be applied to the movie, then compared to the biblical worldview. Despite portions of the movie that uphold virtue and self-sacrifice, the worldview of *Gladiator* as a whole is not consistent with the biblical worldview. The powerful images, attractive packaging of false ideas, and emotional manipulation pervasive throughout the entertainment industry demonstrate the need for Christians to have a clear worldview understanding.

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What's a Christian Worldview?

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