

# THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

## Unit 1 Reading 2

Stonestreet, “Biblical Worldview. What it Is, What it Is Not”

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# Biblical Worldview: What It Is, and What It Is Not

By: John Stonestreet, March 11, 2010

A worldview is the framework of basic beliefs that we hold, whether we realize it or not, that shapes our view of and for the world. Everyone has a worldview. The question is not **whether** one has a worldview, but **which** worldview one has.

There has been a recent proliferation of camps, conferences, books, and organizations promoting the idea of **Biblical worldview**. Whereas the word “worldview” would have in times past elicited a blank stare, many Christians today have at least some familiarity with the concept.

But familiarity can breed contempt. “Biblical worldview” is often thrown around today in a haphazard fashion, and it may no longer be clear what it actually means. Also, Biblical worldview may be in danger of dying the death of the “been there, tried that, and we’ve moved on” mentality that is prevalent in so many contemporary program-driven churches and denominations.

This would be tragic for two reasons. First, a Biblical worldview is not a means, like a curriculum or a program. It’s an end. Seeing God, others, the world, and ourselves as God sees them is a *telos* of the Christian life. Second, despite all the **rhetoric** of Biblical worldview, it is not necessarily a **reality**. According to recent studies produced by the Barna Group, only 20% of those claiming to be born again and less than 1% of young adults in America can answer a basic set of theological questions according to the biblical worldview.

## *Biblical Worldview: What It’s Not*

Before looking at what a biblical worldview is, let’s consider what it is **not**.

**1) A Biblical worldview is not merely holding to Christian morals.** Certainly, Christian morals flow from a Biblical worldview, but one could hold Christian morals without having the Biblical foundations to ground those morals. One can even hold to Christian morals for wrong reasons, including mere tradition, convenience, or a legalistic attempt at God’s approval.

Unfortunately, it is common for students to be taught Christian morals without being taught **why those morals are true**. However, moral values not grounded in truths that transcend one’s context no longer make sense when the context changes. This sort of faith is highly volatile, especially in today’s world of ever-changing contexts.

The Bible grounds morality in God Himself. Because the Biblical worldview begins with a Creator, we live in a world that was designed—not a random place with arbitrary rules. Moral norms flow from God’s character, expressed in His design for His creation.

**2) A Biblical worldview is not just living life with Bible verses attached.** Many Christians only know the Bible in bits and pieces. Verses and chapters are taken out of context to supplement or “Christianize” their life, and Biblical narratives are only useful for finding that moral nugget to apply to our lives. In this approach, the Bible is merely a therapeutic tool and never alters one’s orientation to life. These Christians view the Bible through the lens of their existent worldview, rather than having their worldview framed by the Bible.

**3) A Biblical worldview is not automatic from being “saved”.** One can be redeemed and yet not fully think or act like a Christian. The apostle Paul spoke to believers about taking ideas captive (2 Cor. 10), not being taken captive by bad ideas (Col. 2), being transformed by renewing of our minds (Rom. 12), and growing in discernment (Phil. 1).

**4) A Biblical worldview is not Christian reactionism.** This is our reputation in culture, and it is well earned. Worldview rhetoric is often nothing more than code language for defensively reacting to all the bad things in culture. Rather than a view **of** and **for** the world, it becomes just a view **against** the world.

This is a truncated understanding of the Gospel and a poor definition of the term worldview that ignores the rich history of Biblical worldview thinkers. Salvation is not just **from sin**; it is also **to life**. Because we have the capacity to know God’s design for life, humanity, and the cosmos, as well as the impact of the fall on this design, Christians carry the capacity to contribute to the culture, rather than only railing against it.

### *Biblical Worldview: What It Is*

While a full exposition is not possible here, I suggest that a Biblical worldview is unique from all other worldviews in at least three ways.

**1) A Biblical worldview is Biblically grounded.** Jewish Rabbi Abraham Heschel once made the following comment about Christians:

“It seems puzzling to me how greatly attached to the Bible you seem to be and yet how much like pagans you handle it. The great challenge to those of us who wish to take the Bible seriously is to let it teach us its own essential categories; and then for us to think with them, instead of just about them.”

A Biblical worldview is one that is grounded in the Bible, not just in Biblical literacy. It is important to memorize the Scripture, but memorization is not the goal; transformation is (Rom. 12:1-2, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). A consistent Bible study time is important, but it is a means to a greater end. Rather than just being informed as to what the Bible says, we are to think Biblically about (and be Biblically oriented to) **everything else**. The Psalmist’s exhortation to hide the Word in our hearts is not just rote memorization, as Psalm 1 makes very clear.

One of the great barriers to thinking biblically is relegating Christianity to “spiritual things,” rather than everything. This dichotomy is false and does injustice to the robust message of the Bible. The Bible is first and foremost a **metanarrative**, a grand, sweeping story that claims to be the true story of anything and everything that has ever existed. It begins with the beginning of all things, and ends with the end of all things. We, and all people, live in this story somewhere between Genesis and Revelation.

Thus, the Bible sets the stage for **all aspects of life and culture**. The assumptions we think and live by should be Biblical ones, and we should build on these biblical assumptions when approaching theology, politics, economic theory, medical science, emerging technologies, the arts, human behavior, literature, criminal justice, international relations, or anything else.

**2) A Biblical worldview is culturally literate.** Loving God fully by thinking deeply, discerningly, and truthfully about His world is essential to being a true disciple of Christ. According to the way the Bible presents the grand narrative of God’s redemptive plan, Christianity is neither a religion of ascetic withdrawal nor a dualistic philosophy that denigrates certain human activity as less than spiritual. Followers of Christ are called to dive deeply—and hopefully **head**first—into the significant historical and cultural issues of the human situation. As G.K. Chesterton said, “If Christianity should happen to be true—that is to say if its God is the real God of the universe—then defending it may mean talking about anything and everything.”

Jesus makes this clear in his High Priestly Prayer recorded in John 17. Jesus prays for two groups of people, his disciples (vss. 6-12) and those who would believe because of the disciples’ testimony (vss. 20-22). For both groups, Jesus prays that the Father would be glorified as people came to know Jesus and thus received eternal life. Then, Jesus asks for an astounding thing: that his followers would **not** be taken from the world (vs. 15), but would be protected in the midst of the world by being oriented in the truth (vs. 17).

The Biblical approach to culture is to understand it (2 Cor. 10; Dan. 1), confront it (Dan. 3, Dan 4; Acts 17), and contribute to it (Gen. 2; Jer. 29). The Bible transcends cultural trends and realities because **the Bible is the context of all cultures**. Therefore, we can speak truthfully and significantly to cultural trends and issues, blessing what is good and cursing what is evil.

**3) A Biblical worldview is defined by hope.**

Hope is a crucial aspect of the biblical approach to life and the world. Peter tells the persecuted church to “*always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Pet.3:15). Of all the reputations Christians have today, being hopeful is rarely one of them.

Culturally, hope is in need of re-definition as it has come to mean nothing more than wishful thinking. “I hope he gets voted off American Idol,” or “I hope North Carolina

makes it to the Final Four.” Wishful thinking lacks certainty because it is a hope **for** something.

Biblical hope, however, is full certainty because Biblical hope is not a hope **for**; it is a hope **in**. biblical hope rests squarely in and on Christ—the Creator (John 1), Sustainer (Col. 1), and Redeemer (Rev. 4) of the entire human story.

Christians often miss hope in one of two directions: optimism or despair. Optimism is the “feel good” expression of Christianity that is always positive, full of self-help advice, and offering safe Christian alternatives to all the evil stuff in the world. On the other hand, despair is the escapism that characterizes those who assume the world is headed straight to hell, and there really is nothing we can do about it. Politics, the arts, the courts, and the country are beyond influence and beyond change, and are therefore no place for the believer. We are only to wait for heaven, when we can escape this whole mess.

Because of Christ, neither optimism nor despair is an option for the believer. How deeply broken must the world and we be for God (the Son) to die! Of course, He did not stay dead. He has risen. Death, in fact, has died and nothing that will ever happen in the history of the world will alter this certainty. Thus, despair is no option either.

A Biblical worldview explains the profound goodness and the profound evil that is found in the world and the human heart. No other worldview can do this. Further, the Biblical worldview rests the story of the world and the human heart in the hands of a God who created and has invaded both.