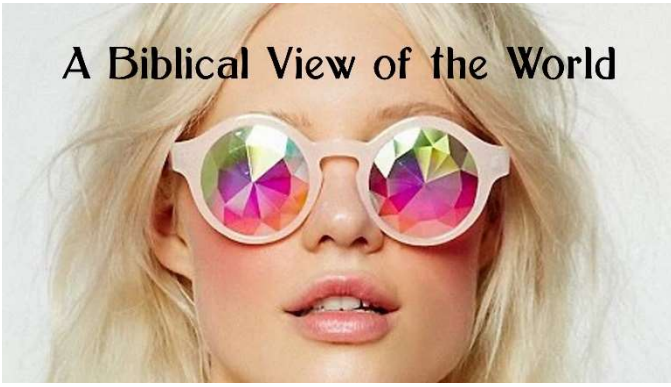


A Biblical View of the World



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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, January 24, 2021

Have you heard the term “worldview”? It refers to the lens through which we view the events and interactions of our world.

Your worldview is a composite of your upbringing, your culture, your education, and (vital to our subject this morning) your faith experience.

More importantly, it is the scale by which we measure all that we see, hear, and feel. Worldview is the way you see your life and evaluate your life—the events, the people, your experiences, your conversations, and even your thoughts.

Evaluations like:

Is it appropriate?

Is it right?

Is it safe?

Is it good?

I am speaking today to the church, our local church. We are a people brought together by our faith in Jesus Christ. We have chosen to navigate life together through our faith in Jesus. We are learning what that means and what that should look like, together.

Yet, we are so diverse. Our ethnic cultures and languages vary. Our stages and conditions of life vary. Our personalities and preferences vary.

The one thing we surely agree about is Jesus Christ. But, if pressed for specifics, even that would be riddled with variations of understanding, confidence, and habit.

And once we step outside this group, the contrasts and discomforts increase rapidly, with the exception, perhaps, of close family members or clubs we have chosen to join.

For many Americans, church is just another club, where people share common likes and dislikes enough that they can tolerate one another, at least for a brief time, but where there is no commitment of self-sacrificing love that compels their interactions, or heals their rifts, or motivates their growth, or empowers their service.

Although they bear the name, Christian, are those groups really representative of the Church, the body of Christ?

What Is The Church?

The Bible defines the church by the Greek word, *ekklesia*—a people called out of their past associations and into a new collective (literally, *called out ones*).

The nation of Israel—called together out of Egypt and separated from idolatrous neighboring nations—was the precursor of the church of Christ. On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the disciples of Jesus were all filled with the Holy Spirit, uniquely marking them as God's *ekklesia*—separate from others, while living, working, and relating among them.

Paul gave these instructions to church leaders: *“So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—His church, purchased with His own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders.”* (Acts 20:28)

Of the church, he also wrote: *“God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made Him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is His body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with Himself.”* (Ephesians 1:22-23)

And this: *“All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.”* (1 Corinthians 12:27)

This last reference, by the way, explains why Christianity is neither socialist in nature nor democratic—it is a hybrid. (Read it again.) Pure socialism embraces the “all of you together,” but rejects individualism. Pure democracy embraces the “each of you is a part,” but rejects collectivism.

Christianity is something unique to both political ideologies. It also includes a King, which neither democracy nor socialism can bear.

Well, that’s the definition, the ideal, but what is the present-day reality?

How Does The Church Behave?

Are we more of a club, or more of a church? What values and habits set us apart from club membership? In other words, how do we exhibit the compulsion of self-sacrificing love, which Jesus modeled for us?

Here are four affirming examples of that compelling self-sacrificing love in action:

1. Forgiving when wronged...

“But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:15)

2. Having the difficult conversations...

“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.” (Matthew 18:15)

3. Changing your ways for the sake of unity...

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

“Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.” (Ephesians 4:11-15)

4. Defending those who are not like us...

“Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. But that doesn’t matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.” (Philippians 1:17-18)

How Christian Are We?

America, founded by a people who shared many beliefs informed by the Bible, has had a culture of Christianity since its beginning. While it has never been a Christian nation, as such, nor could any political nation be such (because God’s Kingdom is not of this world), yet the underpinnings of Christian ethic and morality are easily seen (if no longer appreciated by some).

As a result, many outside observers (and some insiders) have identified the United States as a Christian nation—which I understand to mean “more Christian than anything else.” That has changed—devolved—over time, as surely it must, for the nature of the *ekklesia* is vitally different than the nature of a political state.

The church and nation may share some values—just as you may share some values with your non-Christian neighbors—but they remain intrinsically distinct. Except where there is overlap (which is never central to their function), they operate by different principles and pursue different goals.

So, it is appropriate to ask if our church is an example of cultural Christianity (reflecting more of the ways and values of contemporary culture) or of intentionally Biblical Christianity (bound to the Scriptures to inform and reform our values and habits)?

Questions For Reflection

What would be some examples of a “cultural Christianity” that conforms more to the culture than the Scriptures?

Where these are found, how can we make adjustments that will bring us toward the center of our beliefs?

Is your “faith” merely an ideology? Or is it a vital personal relationship with the Holy Spirit?

Does Jesus just exist in your head, or does He have objective personhood (is He a real person to you)?

Self-Evaluation

Here are some ways you might evaluate the nature of your relationship with Christ:

Do you talk with Jesus as you would an esteemed friend in the seat next to you? And if not, why not?

Can you tell Him anything, or only the things you think *He wants* to hear from you? And if not, why not?

Can He say “No” to you? Can He say “No” to others that you care about?

Can He tell you to do something you don’t want to do? And if He does, will you obey Him?

Do you *have to* obey Him when He instructs you?

You see, the question is not, “Do you *believe* in Jesus?”, but “Is what you believe about Him *true*?”

Window Cleaning

Worldview is not a destination, but the window through which we observe and evaluate. It requires frequent cleaning (adjustment of our understanding by the Scriptures).

When we face new and different challenges in life, our window needs cleaning to maintain a clear view.

When we discover new, previously unrecognized truths in the Bible, our window gets cleaned as our understanding increases.

If we don't continually pursue a thoroughly Biblical worldview, we will drift away from it (that's just the nature of humanity and culture).

That's why I have urged our church to take up daily reading of the Scriptures. If you don't already have a plan that will take you through the entire Old and New Testaments in a year (just four chapters a day), I suggest you enlist in The Bible Project's "One Story Reading Plan."

Here's the web address:

<https://bibleproject.com/reading-plans/>

When you sign up with your email address, you will receive in return a weekly email containing links for the Bible readings for the next seven days, plus brief, helpful explanatory videos and podcasts. Their plan emphasizes easy-to-understand overviews of each book and explanations of how each book fits into the panorama of the Scriptures.

To make the most of your Bible reading, you will need:

- A Bible translation that is easy for you to digest. My three English favorites are the New Living Translation (NLT), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the New English Translation (NET).
- To begin with a simple prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of what you read.
- To read passages in their context, which means book-by-book (don't flit around from verse-to-verse or page-to-page).
- To read Biblical themes in their continuity of development (from cover to cover).
- To read the parts you don't understand, as well as the ones you do.
- To read the parts you don't care for, as well as the ones you do.
- To keep a notepad handy to write down inspired thoughts, questions, or to simply copy a verse that you find meaningful.
- To keep at it, no matter how many times you don't complete the day's reading plan.
- To bring any lingering questions to a pastor or a Bible teacher or a Bible study group.

This is the year! Just do it! You'll be enriched by it.

Your worldview will take a noticeably more Biblical shape.