

The
WORLD-TILTING
Dan Phillips **GOSPEL**

**Embracing a
Biblical Worldview &
Hanging on Tight**

The World-Tilting Gospel: Embracing a Biblical Worldview & Hanging on Tight
© 2011 by Dan Phillips

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*To God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,
Creator of the plan of the ages;
And to Jesus Christ His only Son, the Focus and Executor of that plan;
And to the Holy Spirit, Revealer of that plan,
and Life-giver for its beneficiaries—
All glory, honor, and praise!*

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Preface

The idea behind the core of this book was born in something I heard David Wells say at the Founder's Conference in Oklahoma, on June 27, 2007.

Wells delivered a message titled "Preaching the Truth of the Cross for the Modern Age." In it, Wells let loose an arresting thought that he later expressed in *The Courage to Be Protestant*:

Christianity is not just an experience, we need to remember, but it is about truth. The experience of being reconciled to the Father, through the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit all happens within a *worldview*. This worldview is the way God has taught us in his Word to view the world. *That is why the Bible begins with Genesis 1:1 and not with John 3:16.*¹

1. Wells, *Courage to Be Protestant*, 45 (emphasis added). For all source notes, full bibliographic information is available in the bibliography proper.

Preface

I love compressed truth. Wells's observation was as brilliant as it was pithy. It went off in my imagination like a thrilling cascade of fireworks, effectively illuminating and framing so much that had been troubling me about today's church scene.

People leap for an experience, fall short of truth, and wander off lost and aimless. A truncated "half-spell" has been substituted for the biblical Gospel. The "nice bits" have been snipped out, isolated, and dolled up as more marketable. Folks have signed on without any real grasp of the Gospel in all its fullness and power.

Many professed Christians regard the Gospel as our ticket "in," and then we're done with it. It's like a contract: We ignore the lawyer-talk, sign it, and then forget about it. We think that the Gospel was *beginner's* material. Pray a prayer, pen your name, you're "in"; now move on to something else.

But what too many of us have not grasped is:

- who we really are
- what kind of world we are really living in
- how the world really operates and where it is really going
- who God really is
- what His eternal plan really was
- why we really needed Him and His plan so desperately
- what His terms—the Gospel—really were
- what difference the Gospel will really make on every day of our lives

To discover the reality of these issues, to begin to understand that reality in its fullness, we simply must start with Genesis 1:1.

This is precisely where I am wading in, as I will explain in the introduction.

Introduction

Now We Have the Buck, So Where's the Bang?

Flash back with me nineteen-hundred-plus-change years ago. We're in the Macedonian city of Thessalonica in Asia Minor. Local citizens (religious and sacrilegious, upstanding and gutter-wallowing) have just dragged a few of their fellow townsmen before the city officials. Here is their outraged complaint: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:6–7).

That was quite a charge! Perhaps it reflects a combination of mob-hysteria and hyperbole. Perhaps it was a cynical "massaging" of the facts, calculated to alarm the authorities and win their powerful support. Regardless, this was the effect these Christians had on the mob.

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The accused (Jason and friends) represent the first generation of Christians, and they are fairly typical of the believers of those days. These Christians, whose activities are recorded carefully by Luke in Acts, seem eventually to cause some sort of disturbance or riot everywhere they go.

How did they do it?

The first Christians didn't have any power base whatsoever. They didn't control the local media. They had no big name celebrities giving concerts with two-minute "testimonies" at the end. They didn't have massive popular numbers. They didn't have PR firms shining their image.

They didn't have lines of clothing, entertainment, or holy hardware. They didn't even own buildings. Their assemblies could mostly be contained in people's houses. They didn't control any institutions—religious, educational, or political. They didn't have money, equipment, or rapid-transport vehicles. They couldn't even Twitter!

Yet they created something like blind panic virtually everywhere they went.

How did they do it?

Fast-forward to our day and glance around at evangelicalism. All the things that Group A (first-century church) lacked, Group B (modern evangelicalism) has: institutions, sway, numbers, technology, money, equipment, connections, glitz, and glamour.

Everything except world-tilting! Whatever you can say they are doing, you can't say evangelicals are turning the world upside down. In fact, you could make a better case that the *world* has turned the *church* upside down.

Why is that? Verse 7 provides a very strong hint as to what our forebears in the faith did: "They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." Allowing for ignorant misrepresentation, surely this means that the offenders

are not fitting in—that they had a different allegiance which in turn produced a different way of looking at everything. In modern parlance, we would say they held to a different worldview that showed in the way they lived.

How does it show? Had they advocated the overthrow of government? Had they campaigned against civil institutions? Had they taken out ads complaining when the world acted like . . . well, like the world? Did they hold concerts, dances, “forty days of sex” campaigns (as one pastor promoted)? No, no, no, and you’ve-*got-to-be-kidding-me*, respectively.

What they did can be seen a few verses earlier:

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. (Acts 17:1–4)

After he was run out of Thessalonica, Paul followed the same procedure in the next town, Berea (v. 10). The results were initially happier, but ultimately the same: He was once again run out of town (vv. 13–14). And then, when he landed in Athens, Paul opened the Word in the synagogues; then he took it to the marketplaces, telling passersby about Christ (v. 17).

In all these towns and elsewhere, Paul went where the people were, and preached Christ to them, from Scripture. He preached the Gospel. The apostle defined this as his very mission, in varying language:

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He was set apart for the Gospel (Rom. 1:1).

He served God in the Gospel (Rom. 1:9).

He was sent to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:17).

His lot would be abject misery if he could not preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).

He was dedicated to giving full expression to the Gospel (Col. 1:23–25).

So it is unsurprising that Paul did in Thessalonica what he did everywhere. It was his standard operating procedure. Paul did two things:

1. He found people, and
2. He preached Christ to them.

Paul preached scripturally, thoroughly, fully, pointedly, effectively—and upsettingly. Paul showed not only the *fact*, but also the *necessity and purpose* of Christ's death on the cross.

The rest of what happened in Thessalonica can be pieced together from Paul's letters to the church there, written not long afterward. We read there that the Thessalonians received the Gospel as what it was, the Word of God (1 Thess. 1:5). This resulted in a paradigm shift. They abandoned their false gods to serve the true and living God (1:9). Their faith prompted work, and their love produced hard and persistent efforts (1:3). And all of this centered on the Thessalonians' very real hope in Jesus (1:3b, 10).

The Thessalonian believers themselves became conduits of the Gospel. The same Gospel that had gripped and transformed Paul also captivated them. Even after Paul left, wholly independently of him, the Gospel sounded out from Thessalonica far and broad, to such a degree that Paul found that their testimony often had actually preceded him (1 Thess. 1:8–10).

The apostle's delight leaps off the pages. These poor, persecuted

Introduction

Thessalonian Christians had a vital grasp of the Gospel. They were turning the world upside down, too! World-tilting is not confined to the apostles. It is for every Christian.

What happened? What divides most Christians then from too many Christians now? Simple:

1. The leaders preached Jesus from the Word of God, and continued to preach the Word. Modern evangelical pastors, too often, don't.
2. People became Christians for one reason only: They believed Jesus because they received the Word of God *as* the Word of God. Modern evangelicals, too often, don't.
3. Converts to Christ knew what they had been, what they had needed, and what God had done to rescue and transform them. They had a biblical worldview that explained the need for and nature of the Gospel. Modern evangelicals, too often, don't.
4. Christians in church fellowships made the instant and necessary connection between believing and obeying. They got on with it so effectively that it threatened the world and made Jesus *the* issue. Modern evangelicals, too often, don't.

Excellent books have been written and passionate voices raised about the first and second points—including John Stott, David Wells, John MacArthur, and a host of others.

This book deals at length with the third point, to demolish modern, muddle-headed *barriers* to the fourth point.

Barrier Busting

As I see it—and as poll after poll proves—too many people who regard themselves as Christians are utterly clueless about the most fundamental truths. They don't understand what God says about the

human condition. They don't know what God meant to do when He made man, what happened to us to wreck us up, or what we really need. Cherished traditional notions they have in abundance; biblical truth in all its raw, intrusive, and transforming power, they lack.

Consequently, they aren't at all prepared to grasp the grandeur of what God has done for people in Christ. With that wobbly and incomplete foundation, they may claim to have "received" Jesus, may really believe they have done so—but nothing comes of it. They think and live just like the world.

As I said: They don't tilt the world. The world tilts them because of various barriers erected in their minds through exposure to *bad teaching*. A variety of false doctrines hold them back from enjoying the life to which God calls them in Jesus Christ. They bank on bad teaching, they're burdened by bad teaching, and they're bound by bad teaching.

Banking on Bad Teaching

Some professing Christians are naturally indolent, lazy, retiring, introspective, self-involved, perhaps even selfish—and the rotten teaching they get magnifies and calcifies those tendencies. They refuse to trust and obey; they feel no need to try and to dare and to engage. Worse, they do all this *nothingness* in the name of the Lord.

God's Word has good news for just such folks: The cross of Christ means far more than you've been told, and Jesus wants to have much more to do with your life than you have thought!

Burdened by Bad Teaching

Other Christians dearly want to soar, but they keep crashing. These poor souls fell into teaching that promised quick fixes and jump starts to their spiritual lives. "Just follow our instructions"

Introduction

(they were told), “and you will soar to victory! Pray ____! Bind ____! Unleash ____! Receive ____! Claim ____!”

So they followed the instructions. They prayed, bound, unleashed, received, claimed . . . and maybe they danced a little jig, to boot. Yet they kept crashing, and crashing, and crashing.

Now they feel like giving up. Maybe they have given up. There is great, glorious news in the Word for them as well: The cross of Christ means *far more* than you’ve been told, and Jesus has yet more grace and wisdom for your path.

Bound by Bad Teaching

Still others are reluctant captives who would love to break out and live boldly for God’s glory. But they have been fed a line of bad teaching that has convinced them that they dare do no such thing. It has them stalled on the roadside in a holy haze. They cannot risk making a move for fear of doing it wrong and ruining all.

The Bible has wonderfully good news for them as well! The cross of Christ means *far more* than you’ve been told, and it brings a freedom for you that you’ve only dreamt of thus far! Once the good news grips you (as one of my blog readers gladly reported), “some major chains” will shatter, and you’ll be free to blast off.

The world needs tilting, and bad doctrinal barriers need busting. I say we do it.

A Whole-Bible Gospel

The greatest need of the church today is a strategic, full-orbed, robust, biblical grasp of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its transformative implications. We don’t need more glitz or glamour, better marketing or programs, snazzier décor or entertainment. We do need a *whole-Bible* grasp of the Gospel.

Introduction

What I am going to do for you is lay out, in plain language, that biblically framed Gospel. I'll spell it out so that any willing reader can grasp it. You will see, from the Bible:

- who we are
- who God is
- how we got where we are
- what we need
- what God has done
- what difference it makes

Engage yourself in this study with me, with an open mind and an open Bible, and you will be in a position to understand, grasp, and explain the Gospel *biblically*. You will see how God Himself framed and laid out His eternal plan. You will see the difference it makes in how we view and relate to the world.

As we launch out on this venture together, we will encounter those core, essential biblical truths in four movements and a crescendo.

Part One

In the first three chapters I lay out the Bible's portrait of you, me, all human beings everywhere. We will see that sin did not merely damage or cripple us. It ruined us; it killed us. Accordingly, we will see that none of us needs just a little help or a leg up from God. No, we need a massive rescue operation that only God could undertake, and only without our "help."

Part Two

In chapters 4 through 6, we will learn more of God's nature. We'll see how the plan of redemption springs from His great heart and His vast, immeasurable wisdom, in line with His devastating purity.

Introduction

We will see the very first primeval glimmer of His plan, and then trace its unfolding through the ages. Scripture will teach us how the whole symphony of revelation points to Christ. Then we will come to understand how Christ came to execute and consummate this plan, gaining a vital grasp both of Jesus Christ's person and His work.

Part Three

The great nineteenth-century British preacher Charles H. Spurgeon told pastors, "Know where Adam left you; know where the Spirit of God has placed you."¹ This is good advice for us all, and I seek to keep to it in chapters 7 and 8, where we learn how God's "out there" work of salvation comes to have a revolutionary and transforming impact "in here," in our own individual lives.

Part Four

Then, in chapters 9 through 13 we will apply the Gospel to directly confront and lay waste to some of the forces reducing Christians to a miserable state of vapor lock today, and keeping them from having an impact for His kingdom. Some of these are dragonlike dogmas that intimidate and frighten Christians into paralysis. Others are seductive sirens that lull them into a trance-like sleep. Either way, what passes for modern Christian living bears little resemblance to the biblical Gospel model. I mean to strike a resounding blow to upend the status quo.

Crescendo

Then it all comes together and pays off in the last chapter, titled "Culmination: Putting It All Together." You will see what everything

1. Spurgeon, *All-Round Ministry*, 51.

Introduction

has led to, how all the truths fit, and what worldview impact those verities have. We will synthesize everything we've learned in the preceding thirteen chapters, and express in crystallized form how these truths make us world-tilters and barrier-busters.

Ready? Keep a Bible at hand, and pray for a discerning, but teachable spirit. I commend to you (and frequently pray) the prayer of the psalmist:

Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law. (Ps. 119:18)

Part One

Who Are We?

Getting at the Truth of Our Identities

Chapter 1

Knowing God and Man

Which Comes First? What Difference Does It Make?

We want a relationship with God that is real, dynamic, and *going somewhere*. To do that, we must know who this God is. What is He like? What does He love? What does He hate? What does He give? What does He want? And how do we even go about answering any of those questions?

Further, if we are to know and serve God, must we not also have *some* sort of clue about ourselves? Who are we? What do *we* bring to the show? Are we basically good people who need to simply listen to our hearts and everything will be peachy, as Hollywood keeps assuring us? Do we bring God good hearts and good agendas? Is He mainly there to sign off on our itineraries, so we can have our best lives—and our whitest smiles!—right now?

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The answers to those questions make all the difference.

But where do we start? With knowledge of God, or of ourselves? Which has priority? Must we know God in order to know ourselves? Or do we need to know ourselves in order to know God?

Calvin was here, way back in 1536. John Calvin grappled with these very questions, though you might not have guessed he would. He wasn't in Geneva to cut the cake (nor sample the chocolates that Swiss chocolatier Blaise Poyet produced in his honor), but the great Reformer/theologian/expositor's five hundredth birthday fell in July of 2009. Calvin is perhaps best known for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he wrote¹ as devotional reading for Christians, not as brain-jerky for theologians. The *Institutes* was structured along the familiar lines of the Apostles' Creed, for easy consumption.

Nonetheless, Calvin has gotten a reputation as being the ultimate button-down theologian, the man with the answer to anything and everything.

Yet even Calvin admitted that this was a hard call.

After asserting that all wisdom starts with knowledge of God and of ourselves, Calvin confesses that "which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern." He continues:

In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he "lives and moves" [Acts 17:28]. . . . Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself. For we always seem to ourselves righteous and upright and wise and holy—this pride is innate in all of us—unless

1. Finishing his first draft at age 25!

by clear proofs we stand convinced of our own unrighteousness, foulness, folly, and impurity. Moreover, we are not thus convinced if we look merely to ourselves and not also to the Lord, who is the sole standard by which this judgment must be measured.²

It's impossible to measure without a standard. It's impossible to apply a standard if we don't know what we're measuring. But which comes first?

Chronologically, self-awareness comes first, and indeed fills our whole conscious life. No healthy baby has to be persuaded to be self-concerned. Nor have I ever met an infant who would say, "You know, some nice, warm milk would be great . . . but it would glorify God more if I let Mom get some sleep." Babies don't even rise to "I am fearfully and wonderfully *made*," but rather, "I am fearfully and wonderfully *wet*."

Yet while self-awareness comes first in time, surely the knowledge of God comes first in importance. Christian readers will grant that our concept of God affects how we see everything. The case I want to make is that our view of ourselves as we stand before God is inextricably interwoven with our view of God.

Think it through with me.

Wrong Answers and the Damage They Cause

Self-image matters, but not in the way that pop psychology paints it. What one makes of the human condition—what you think you are now, and/or what you think you were when God found you and made you His—has a major ongoing impact on our approach to God, our view of Him, and our day-to-day relationship with God.

2. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 35, 37.

The World-Tilting Gospel

Let's consider three different approaches to understanding ourselves, as embodied by three different characters. These certainly are not exhaustive, but they help us see the far-reaching significance of our self-estimation.

"Here, God, just sign this."

Suppose we have the belief that we are good people who simply need a bit of a leg up. We aren't really bad-hearted. People just don't understand us. Deep down inside we mean well and want good things. Oh, we may have a few bad habits, we sometimes make a bad call here and there—a mistake, a goof, an "oops" . . . but it's what's inside that counts, and what's inside is *good*.

Here's Bud Goodheart, for instance. Bud sees himself as a decent, moral, well-meaning guy. So naturally Bud is attracted to the sort of worldview that presents God as the grand Rubber Stamp in the Sky. This God loves us unconditionally, just as we are, and wants us to realize our deepest dreams and aspirations. "Go for it, child!" Bud's God cheers. "I'm right behind you!" That's the line from the pulpit . . . or stool, or "enablement stand," or whatever. "God wants you to pursue your dreams!"³

So Bud simply brings God his biggest and brightest dreams, and God signs off on them. *Whump! Whump! Whump!* goes the heavenly rubber stamp. *Approved!* God claps Bud on the back, gives a big thumbs-up—and off Bud trots. Pursuing *Bud's* agenda. Because God has Bud's back.

How will such a man, such a woman, see Christ? Not as a Savior, surely. As Facilitator, as Enabler, as Cheerleader inspiring him to

3. Do these preachers even wonder, as they speak, whether their hearers include any Adolph Hitlers, Dylan Klebolds, or Osama bin Ladens, dreaming their dark and malevolent dreams?

pursue his dreams, his goals, his ambitions. What is the Cross, to Bud? If anything, it is an expression of God's love and approval. The Cross proves how much Bud means to God, how worthy Bud is, how irresistibly adorable Bud is to God. The Cross tells Bud that he is okay—that God just wants to fulfill Bud and make him happy with himself. It's about affirmation, not execution.

Bud may view the Christian life as an ongoing negotiation with his partner, Jesus. Nothing radical, certainly. After all, Bud "invited" Jesus in, he gave Christ a "chance," he "tried Christ" (like the bumper sticker says). Jesus was a plug-in, an add-on, like some enhancement to a web browser—a really good and powerful plug-in that promises big things, but a plug-in nonetheless.

And Bud maintains control of the relationship.

But, you see, if Bud is wrong about himself, and he's wrong about God, and he's wrong about Christ, and he's wrong about the Cross—then Bud is wrong about the relationship, too.

It matters!

"I couldn't have done it without You—and vice versa."

Another fellow—Lodowick (Lodo) Legup—has been convinced that he needs Christ as Savior and Lord, and has come to be saved and led. Lodo knows he's a sinner, and looks to Christ to do something about that.

But, oddly enough, Lodo thinks that sin has disabled him, hurt him, wounded him—but not *killed* him as dead as, say, Julius Caesar. So Lodo has this inner notion that he still brings something positive to the equation. Lodo's Jesus holds out most of the makings of a nice big yummy Salvation Pie, but it's not really a pie until Lodo puts the "decision cherry" on the top, or the "faith sprinkles." Jesus is really a great help. He did a lot, all the heavy lifting and big stuff; but it's still nothing until Lodo does *his* part.

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Jesus helps Lodo—but Lodo helps Jesus, too. In fact, without Lodo's help, nothing happens.

So, without in any way meaning to, Lodo has Jesus as Cosigner instead of Savior. Because the relationship is still partly based on Lodo's performance, on his works, he has the feeling deep down that God doesn't really like him much, or love him, unless he does his part. After all, He didn't save him until Lodo did his part first. God responded to Lodo then, so maybe He responds now. Lodo works so that God will like him, so that Jesus will love him and keep him. If Lodo stopped, he'd lose that relationship. That kind of fear motivates Lodo.

To Lodo, the Cross is where God did everything He could, made salvation *possible* and *attainable*, and then left it to Lodo to make it happen. The relationship started partly because of what God did, and partly because of what Lodo did. But Lodo added the decisive element. The relationship continues the same way.

Lodo may not be prepared to take up a cross himself, or do anything radical. After all, God didn't have to do anything too radical to save him. Lodo wasn't *so* bad off that Lodo himself couldn't provide the essential ingredient. Lodo kept *part* of the salvation package, and now he'll keep part of the Christian-life package.

But if Lodo is wrong about himself, and he's wrong about God, and he's wrong about Christ, and he's wrong about the Cross—then Lodo is wrong about the relationship, too.

It matters.

“Whimper words of ‘wisdom,’ let it be.”

Our third person—an unmarried lass named Misty Call—is also convinced of her real, deep-down need of Christ. Misty comes to Christ as Savior and Lord. In that way, she's like the second model we just talked about.

Misty thinks she was spiritually helpless. Misty would say that. Yet she *also* thinks she had enough in herself to bring herself to Christ. And now there's *more* for Misty Call to do . . . and here it gets really confusing.

Misty believes she needs to empty herself of herself. Misty needs to yield. She needs to surrender, to make herself nothing, to wait for God to take control, pick her up, perhaps even talk directly to her, and move her about. Kind of like a living puppet.

Yet Misty Call still controls the relationship, since God is waiting for her to yield, surrender, and make herself nothing. Spiritually she isn't much until this great surrender happens. She's snagged in an odd state, what computer programmers have called an "endless do-loop." Commands circle and circle within her, but nothing happens. Nothing can. Misty is afraid to do anything, because she's not supposed to do anything. Well, she is. But she isn't. What she's supposed to *do* is surrender. This will make God make Misty do something. But until then, she'd better do nothing. Or God will do nothing.

Subtly, you see, Misty also controls the relationship.

The Cross, to Misty, is where she dies . . . and all but ceases to exist. It's the symbol of passive yieldedness to God, of absolute surrender and submission, of virtually vanishing as an individual, and melting into the divine. It isn't judicial;⁴ it is *mystical*.

Misty Call's life will be a blur of muzzy mysticism. Misty will be suspicious of the rational, the objective, the external. Though Misty will grant that the Bible is God's Word, she'll really be straining her mystical inner ear to hear something better, higher, deeper. Faithful reasoning and obedience are not big themes to Misty.

But if Misty is wrong about herself, and she's wrong about God,

4. We will examine this more deeply in chapter 11.

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and she's wrong about Christ, and she's wrong about the Cross—then Misty is wrong about the relationship, too.

It matters. *It all matters.*

Our Hearts Are Jacob

All three of our characters have something in common with the world. The world insists that we must “listen to our hearts”—and Bud, Lodo, and Misty partially agree. Each of them finds something that is of value, whether it's Bud's dreams, Lodo's activities, or Misty's muzzy inner light. The world won't care so much if they bring in a little religion, just so long as they continue to look within for their answers, their deliverance—their salvation.

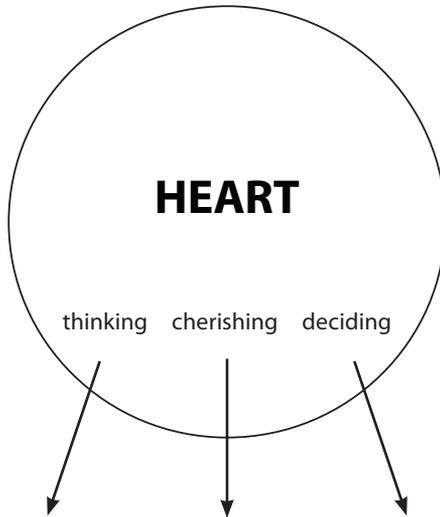
God's view is exactly opposed to the world's—and here starts the tilting.

The Bible is absolutely emphatic about the fact that we will not find the truth by ourselves, within ourselves. We cannot diagnose ourselves. One telling statement is found in Jeremiah 17:9—“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Heart. God speaks here of our “heart.” Perhaps you have been taught that the heart is the “center of the emotions.” That sense may dominate English poetry and songs and movies, but it isn't the biblical idea. In the Bible, the heart is the fountainhead of the way we live (Prov. 4:23). It is the seat not only of our emotions, but of our calculated plans (Gen. 6:5; Prov. 16:1, 9, etc.), our intellect (Prov. 18:15), our values (Matt. 15:18), and our decisions (1 Cor. 7:37). Our heart is, in short, action central. It is where we do our thinking, cherishing, and deciding.

So you see this *heart* is not located in our chest. It is located between our ears.

Here is a graphic way to envision what the Bible means by “heart”:



Deceitful. God says that our heart is “deceitful.” That word translated “deceitful” merits a closer look. Jeremiah uses the Hebrew noun *‘āqōb* (ah-COVE), which is related to the name “Jacob” (*ya^aqōb*, ya-aCOVE). The prophet’s readers might well have caught the connection right away: “Your heart is like a Jacob inside of you,” the prophet says, in effect.

Clear? As mud? Stay with me. Let’s look further.

Just think about the patriarch Jacob. What was he? He was a con artist. His very name means “heel-catcher,” because he came out of the womb holding onto his brother’s *‘āqēb* (ah-CAVE), his heel. It was a colloquialism that meant someone who would come up on another person from behind and trip him up to take advantage of him.

Jacob was a pretty despicable fellow. He takes advantage of his brother’s hunger in order to trick his birthright out of him (Gen. 25:29–34). He takes advantage of his father’s poor eyesight to trick him out of the blessing (Gen. 27). Brother, father, no matter: Jacob is out for *Jacob*. He’s a conniver and a trickster.

The World-Tilting Gospel

Above all things. God says our *hearts* are like that: conniving, deceptive. Not merely deceptive, but deceptive “above all things.” The human heart is *intensely* conniving; it is that, more than it is anything else. Whatever capacity the heart may have for occasional goodness, honesty, good intentions—more than all that, the human heart is deceptive.

We’ve got our own Jacob living in our craniums, busily doing our thinking and cherishing and deciding.

So what is the effect when our most fundamental power of perception is deceitful?

It will affect the way you and I see *everything*.



Desperately sick. *Deceitful* is bad enough, yet God adds that our heart is “desperately sick.” How sick? The word *’ānuš* (ah-NOOSH) means *incurable*. It is used of incurable pain (Isa. 17:11; Jer. 30:15), and an incurable wound (Jer. 37:12). Our heart isn’t annoyed by a passing cold. It doesn’t have a summer headache. No, our heart is stricken with a spiritual cancer.

Who can know it? No wonder the prophet asks “who can know it?” The answer Jeremiah fully expects is “No one!”

That is why we cannot diagnose ourselves. What would we use as our instrument? Our minds, of course; which is to say, our *hearts*. Ah, but there’s the problem, isn’t it? The instrument is corrupt! It is irreparably out of whack. It skews the answers, it messes with the data. It gathers information like the mainstream media takes polls: “Are people who oppose abortion hateful or just ignorant?”

The heart sees what it wants to see, and conveniently finds inconvenient truths invisible. Self-diagnosis is hopeless.

The Case of Doctor Me

When I was seventeen, I had a dull ache in the pit of my stomach. Bothersome, but not agonizing. My mother prevailed on me to see the doctor, which I did reluctantly. I thought it would be wasted money.

I figured I had some minor nothing. Kindly Dr. Harry Kerber would poke and prod and look judicious, tell me to drink some antacid or laxative or something, pat my head, and send me home. Thus spake “Doctor” Phillips.

Wrong!

Kindly Dr. Kerber (a real doctor, not one on TV) did poke and prod—and he said it was serious. He said I should go see a surgeon right away.

I didn’t care much for his diagnosis. It didn’t match my own. It didn’t make me happy. I didn’t feel *that* bad. True, it hurt a bit to raise my foot to shift gears in my Pinto, but that was it. The good doctor sounded as if he were a bit of an alarmist. My diagnosis was much milder, much less radical, much less distressing.

What if I’d gone with “Doctor” Phillips’s diagnosis instead of Dr. Kerber’s?

The World-Tilting Gospel

For one thing, you'd not be reading this book.

As it was, I did bow to Dr. Kerber's judgment. He called up a surgeon, sent me right over to his office, and a few hours later I went under the knife. When I awoke, I was in far greater pain, but minus a red-hot appendix.

An appendix that would have killed me, if I'd gone with my self-diagnosis.

We are terrible at self-diagnosis. Our "knower" is broken! That is why the prophet says that no one can "know" the deceptive, incurably sick heart of man.

Who knows what lurks in the hearts of men? God alone. No *man* can know our heart. The next verse tells us, "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind" (Jer. 17:10a). God brings what we lack. His diagnosis of us is everything our self-diagnosis is not: It is objective, exhaustive, measured by an absolute and unimpeachable standard, and it is true. God searches the heart, He says.

In fact, earlier Solomon had written that "The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts" (Prov. 20:27). God can compel our own spirit to be an internal informant, coughing up our deepest secrets on demand. Not that God needs such an informant. His understanding is infinite (Ps. 147:5). All things are visible, naked, and vulnerable before the One to whom we must give an account (Heb. 4:13). There is absolutely no fooling Him.

God alone has the goods on us. So if we want the truth about ourselves as individuals, or about humanity in general, we need to get it from God Himself.

What We Need: A Whole-Bible View

Our three friends share a common deficiency. Their understanding of Christianity is based on a reprocessed version based distantly on a few selected verses plucked hither and thither from

Scripture, mostly from the New Testament (hereafter NT). Those isolated scraps are reassembled according to worldviews not only *not* based on Scripture, but actually hostile to it.

They (and we) must understand that the whole Bible gives us the goods both on God and on us. It is God's unalloyed, inerrant disclosure of Himself, and His diagnosis of the human condition. What the Bible says, God says.

Where did I get that idea? I got it from Jesus. What we call the "Old Testament" came up constantly in Jesus' teaching ministry, and His attitude was always the same: What the Old Testament said, God said. Every bit of it was Scripture, and could not be broken (John 10:35). It was given by God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 22:43), so not the smallest part of it could be nullified (Matt. 5:17–18). Jesus treated its narratives as unerring historical fact (Matt. 12:40–41; 19:4–6). No human doctrine ever could outrank and set aside what the Old Testament said (Mark 7:6–13).

In all His teaching, Jesus confirms what the Old Testament (hereafter OT) says about itself. It claims to represent God's very words (Gen. 1:3). It quotes Him verbatim (Exod. 20:1ff.). It claims for itself qualities reflecting both its divine origin and its continuing power under God (Pss. 19:7–11; 119).

To understand Jesus, we must begin where His thinking begins: not with John 3:16, but with Genesis 1:1, and on through all that follows. There we find the truth that forms the basis of Jesus' teaching, truth that we would never find within our own deceptive, incurably sick hearts.

To understand who Jesus says that we *are*, we must understand who we *were*, and what we *became*, and how we *got* there.

For that, we're going to need to start at the beginning.