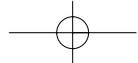
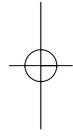
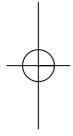




What Is the Christian Worldview?



Basics of the Reformed Faith

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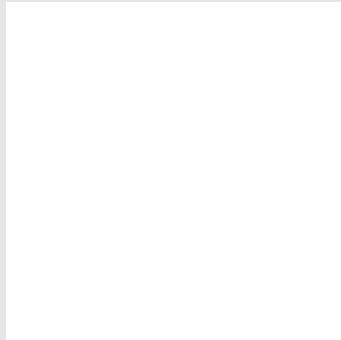
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■ Consider what the following everyday encounters tell us about the various ways in which different people look at the world:

I am out shoveling sixteen inches of snow into huge piles by the street when a neighbor stops by to speculate as to when all the snow will ever disappear. “Well, God brought it here,” I say, “and only God can take it away.” Taking clear objection to my reasoning, my neighbor sniffs, “It was a low-pressure system, you know.” And of course I do know that, but I also believe that even the weather system is under God’s sovereign control.

While I am admiring the new artwork in my home—large, beautiful abstract prints of paintings by New York artist Mako Fujimura on the themes of incarnation, grace, and the atonement—the manager of a local art gallery asks whether she can borrow the prints for an exhibition. She knows that some Christians don’t have very much appreciation for the arts, and that most non-Christians don’t have very much understanding of the gospel, so she wants both the church and the community to see the work of Christian artists. Since I am eager to share work that I love, we arrange the time and the place for its delivery.

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In a friendly manner that is not always appreciated on the streets of Philadelphia, my mother-in-law tries to engage one of my neighbors in congenial conversation. "The Rykens have just had another baby," she says. "Oh," says my neighbor, obviously unimpressed. "It's always the religious that have all the kids, isn't it?"

We are at the park playing baseball, and it is Jack's turn to bat. He's only four, but he knows what he's doing at the plate—better, as it turns out, than he knows what he's doing on the base paths. He hits a sharp grounder back to the mound, which I field and throw to first for the out. Jack veers sharply away from the baseline and runs haphazardly around the infield before returning to home plate. "I get to choose my own bases," he announces, in what sounds like the basic principle for postmodern ethics. Laughing, I say, "Okay, buddy. You can choose your own bases, but they're not the real bases, so you're still out."

These everyday encounters all reveal the worldviews of the people involved. The way I shovel snow is a testimony to God's creation and providence. What I hang on my wall bears witness to the beauty and truth of Jesus Christ. The way I raise my family shows what I believe about love, marriage, and God's plan for the world. Even the way I play baseball reflects the purpose of leisure in an ordered universe. What a difference it makes to be a Christian!

At the same time, the way other people respond reveals *their* worldview—their unbelief in the existence of God, for example, or their insistence on living by their own rules. Even ordinary interactions reflect value commitments on the basic issues of art and science, work and play,

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family and society—even life and death. Whenever we bump into the world, our worldview comes spilling out.

Worldviews also have a way of bumping into one another. The examples above all deal with conflicting commitments at the level of daily life, but of course different views of the world have culture-wide influence. The major conflicts in today's society—the conflict between creation and evolution, for example, or between freedom and terrorism, or between decency and degradation in popular entertainment, or between the right to life and the so-called right to die—come at the places where worldviews collide.

The conflict between Christian and non-Christian worldviews calls for cultural engagement. In an increasingly secularized society, Christians will often find their ideas under attack. How can we maintain a Christ-centered perspective on the contested issues of our day? And how can we live out a faithful Christian testimony at home, at church, at school, at work, and in the marketplace of ideas? Only by having the worldview that is introduced in this booklet: a consistently Christian worldview that shapes our thoughts, guides our words, and motivates our actions.

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

A worldview—or “world-and-life view,” as some people call it—is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose. It is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, the orientation of our soul. It is the “comprehensive framework of our basic belief about things,”¹ or “the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.”²

Ideally, a worldview is a well-reasoned framework of beliefs and convictions that gives a true and unified perspective on the meaning of human existence. Or we could say that a worldview is the story we tell to answer such questions as

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these: Why is there anything at all? How can we know for sure? How did we get here, and what are we here for, anyway? Why have things gone so badly wrong? Is there any hope of fixing them? What should I do with my life? And where will it all lead in the end?

Whether we realize it or not, we all have basic beliefs about who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. This is unavoidable. Even people who never stop to think about their worldview in any self-reflective way nevertheless live on the basis of that worldview. It is so basic to who we are that usually we hardly even notice it, but simply take it for granted. A worldview is sometimes compared to a pair of spectacles, but maybe our eyes themselves would be a better analogy. When was the last time you noticed that you were seeing? We don't even think about seeing; we just see, and we are seeing all the time. Similarly, even if we never think about our worldview, we still view everything with it, and then apply our view of things to the way we live.

Furthermore, our worldview always reveals our fundamental religious commitments. Langdon Gilkey wrote: "Whether he wishes it or not, man as a free creature must pattern his life according to some chosen ultimate end, must center his life on some chosen ultimate loyalty, and must commit his security to some trusted power. Man . . . inevitably roots his life in something ultimate."³ Even people who say that they do not believe in God have ultimate commitments, and these commitments are reflected in how they do their schoolwork, how they treat their coworkers, how they spend their money, and how they do everything else. Whatever is ultimate for us shapes our total identity. "As [a man] thinks in his heart," the Scripture says, "so is he" (Prov. 23:7 NKJV).

Therefore, our worldview is one of the most important things about us. G. K. Chesterton proved this point by using an everyday example: "For a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to