

The battle for your world view

What, you may ask, is a “worldview”? A worldview is the lens through which you view the world. It represents your default assumptions: things you simply “know” to be true.

Here’s an example: “The world is getting better and better.” This is a worldview held by many, many people. Today, this worldview is most closely associated with evolutionists. But in the nineteenth century, this belief was the dominant view held by Christians. In the nineteenth century, their view was that the kingdom of Christ was conquering all the kingdoms of the world, and that Christian rule was gradually spreading around the globe, and that when Christianity dominates every nation on earth, then the millennium of peace and prosperity will arise. Thus the world was getting better and better.

Here’s another example: “The world is getting worse and worse.” All my life, I’ve heard Christians state this as fact. “The world is deteriorating, getting worse. Morality is declining.” It’s highly likely you’ve heard this worldview. Maybe you even believe it to be thoroughly biblical. But in reality, it not a worldview emanating from the Bible.

The Bible’s worldview is that God created this world good, and man rebelled, bringing sin and pain and suffering and death. Within generations great wickedness arose within mankind. Wickedness so bad that God needed to send an entire society into the oblivion of the flood. This tells us that mankind was almost instantly as wicked and depraved as we are today. So, the view that morality is progressively getting worse cannot be supported from the Bible. There is plenty of immoral, idolatrous and barbaric practices inscribed in Biblical history.

So, given the importance of world view, it is really important to examine how our world view has been shaped. For there has been a struggle throughout the ages to shape the Christian world view.

The wrestle to establish the Biblical worldview

Here we are, roughly 2,000 after the incarnation of the Son of Man. The Apostle John, writing in the first century, says that infiltrators were entering the church’s ranks in his day. If they were doing that then, do you think the infiltrations slowed down any in the succeeding centuries?

Today, we’re at the receiving end of 2,000 years of Christian theology. Two thousand years of world view being shaped. Will we allow our worldview to be established by Christian theologians? Who do we entrust in shaping our fundamental world view?

A range of different gospels

At the heart of the Christian faith is the good news of Jesus Christ. Every Christian proclaims the good news. But plenty of us proclaim “different gospels.” In fact, what the gospel actually consists of is one of the most contested areas of debate within

Christendom. Now, what we understand the gospel to be is strongly influenced by whatever theory of atonement we hold to be true.

While we've previously discussed four reformation era theories of atonement¹ in some detail, what follows is a quick summary of twelve different theories of atonement.

The Eastern Orthodox church believes that the gospel results in moral transformation. Jesus saved people from sinfulness through his life and teachings, thus transforming their character to become righteous. In the moral transformation paradigm, a person is saved from sinfulness by faithfully following the teachings of Jesus, and the example he set of how to live. In this view, Jesus' crucifixion is understood primarily as a martyrdom.

Some early Eastern mystics also believed and taught Deification—based on 1 Peter 1:3–11, they claimed that the Christian faith enabled people to put on qualities of Divinity.

In the Christus Victor view, people needed salvation from the powers of evil. Jesus achieved salvation for people by defeating the powers of evil, particularly Satan. Writers such as Eusebius of Caesarea depicted Jesus defeating Satan in a great spiritual battle that occurred between his death and resurrection. By winning this battle, Jesus overthrew Satan and saved people from his dominion.

The ransom theory of atonement entails the idea that Satan had power over people's souls in the afterlife, but that Christ rescued people from his power. In this story, God entered into a deal with Satan, offering to trade Jesus' soul in exchange for the souls of all people. Satan eagerly entered into the trade, believing it would establish his rule on earth forever. But after the trade, God raised Jesus from the dead, leaving Satan with nothing.

In the 11th century, Anselm of Canterbury rejected the ransom view, and proposed the satisfaction theory of atonement. He depicted God as a feudal lord, whose honour had been offended by the sins of humankind. In this view, people needed salvation from the divine punishment that these offences would bring, since nothing they could do could repay the honour debt. Anselm held that Christ had infinitely honoured God through his life and death and that Christ could repay what humanity owed God, thus satisfying the offence to God's honour and doing away with the need for punishment.

In Catholicism, justification is granted by God via the act of baptism, followed by continued reconciliation through sacraments. Should Catholics sin, they believe they are restored to the grace of justification through the sacrament of penance.

In the 16th century, the Luther reinterpreted Anselm's satisfaction theory of salvation within a legal paradigm. In the legal system, offences required punishment, and no satisfaction could be given to avert this need. They proposed a theory known as penal substitution, in which Christ takes the penalty of people's sin as their substitute, thus saving people from God's wrath against sin. Penal substitution thus presents Jesus saving people from the divine punishment of their past wrongdoings.

Calvinists believe that God predestined the elect before the creation of the world, and that those who come to faith are those who God elected.

¹ <http://www.melbsdb.com.au/studies/2015/9/12/four-theories-of-atonement>

Arminius taught that God offers grace to everyone human, but that God's grace can be resisted, enabling humans to accept or reject the offer of salvation through Christ based on free will.

Christian universalism teaches that everyone will eventually be saved, even if some people repent after their death through some purgatory-like cleansing.

Wesley emphasised the need for the new birth, and the need for the continued operation of the Holy Spirit on someone's life to make them holy. Wesley had borrowed the Eastern Orthodox idea of Deification, but redefined the terms: instead of putting on God's Divine attributes, humans are to put on God's moral attributes. Wesley taught that the power of the Holy Spirit working in human lives would result progressively, over time, result in a human who was more and more holy. The Holy Spirit would, as one of His works, place a finishing touch on a human, finally fulfilling their sanctification.

Ellen G. White, who was raised a Methodist, inherited this view of progressive sanctification following justification, but replaced the finishing touch of the Holy Spirit with a judgement of believers. The role of this judgment is to prove who, among the professed followers of Christ, have a character and a life record that is spotless, and thus deserve to receive the merit of Christ. Adherents of this view, therefore, are waiting until the revelation of this judgment to see who will receive eternal life.

Who are you going to believe?

So, we've just reviewed twelve theories of atonement. Whatever theory you hold regarding atonement will surely influence your presentation of the gospel. The question is: Who are you going to believe? There is an on-going battle for your world view.

Who are you going to believe? Are you going to inherit your ideas from Luther, from Calvin, from Wesley? Why do you place your faith in any of these men over and above any of the rest?

Why would you risk reading the Bible through the lens of someone else, when that endeavour has proved such a bad risk for so many people throughout history?

Now, you might say, "But I am reading the Bible in its own terms!" Or, you might say, "But it is impossible to read the Bible in a way that is uninfluenced by my Christian culture!"

Searching for an anti-dote

When we come to the Bible, we must read it under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We must be led by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God must lead our reading.

Whatever ideas we hold, we must be willing to recognise "flies in the ointment." We must be willing to recognise when our worldview really doesn't match the Bible's teachings.

Sometimes, we recognise this when a Biblical word has a different meaning than what we believed. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul uses the word "holy" and "sanctify" in a way that does not correspond with Wesley's view of progressive sanctification.

Sometimes, we find that Jesus is teaching something different from what we think he is teaching. For example, while I have always been taught that, “We need more faith // we need to grow in faith // we need our faith to be strengthened,” when the disciples actually asked Jesus to increase their faith, he replied that even the smallest amount of faith is sufficient (Luke 17:5). And, for Jesus, the anti-dote to the absence of faith is to seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

Sometimes we realise that a book of the Bible is answering a different question from the questions we’re asking. There many people reading Revelation as if it is a newspaper explaining the day’s headlines!

Sometimes a symbol challenges our theology. In any of these cases, we need to be open to the possibility that our worldview needs to change. We need to be open to leading of God, rather than the leading of man.

The anti-dote

“Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Ephesians 6:11–18).

The Apostle Paul explains the antidote. He says we need to put on the:

- Belt of Truth
- Breastplate of Righteousness
- Gospel of Peace
- Shield of Faith
- Helmet of Salvation
- Sword of the Spirit

We must not reach for only one of these elements of armour. We are to put on the entire armour of God. Truth. Righteousness. The Gospel of God. Faith. Salvation. Spirit. The word of God.

A kingdom strikes back

The kingdom of darkness sees these armaments and strikes back. Satan furnishes Christianity with servants of his own choosing, and seeks to pervert the message of the gospel. Satan seeks to influence a Christian’s worldview, so that when a Christian comes

to the Bible, he or she only asks questions they have been “programmed” to ask, and make assumptions they have been taught.

Or, multiple theories of theology are created, and set to war against each other, turning Christians against each other, causing them to attack each other, bringing discord and disharmony to the church, discrediting all sides simultaneously in the minds of onlookers, and sapping the energy of the participants so they no longer execute the will of God. And if you think I’m being metaphorical in my use of the word “war,” I’m actually being quite literal, for kingdoms have separated and wars fought ostensibly because of divergent views of how to define “God.”

Just in the last few weeks, I met one Christian who declared that Jesus had erred when predicting His return. Another Christian declared that Peter was wrong when he applied “the great and magnificent day of the LORD” to Jesus’ first Advent. In both cases, these people were allowing their world view to undermine the truth being expressed through the Bible. And, in both cases, they were mistaken.

“Let God be true though every one were a liar” (Romans 3:4).

Conclusion

There is a battle for your mind. It has been raging for centuries. It seeks to influence what you believe, and therefore how to relate to God.

The anti-dote is to be led by the Spirit to correctly interpret scripture, that His Word may dwell within and among us. Let us be open to the LORD’s leading. Let us be open to modifying our worldview when scripture demands that we must. Let us be open to obeying the LORD our God. Let us put on the entire armour of God.