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The Importance of Worldview

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. Colossians 1:16-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John 1:1-5



My wife and I enjoy watching the PBS show *This Old House*. We are fascinated as, over a period of months, they completely remodel and transform a house. They pay painstaking attention to every detail – layout, insulation, windows, trim, wiring, plumbing, architecture, lighting, floors, landscaping, heating and cooling, and everything else.

One of the first things they do is inspect the foundation of the house. Often, due to the effects of time, weather, landscaping, or remodeling, the foundation of the house is in need of repair. Sometimes, the foundation itself is intact but the house no longer sits solidly on the foundation. Before they attempt any other work on the home, they first set the house on a solid, firm foundation.

In order to understand Biblical healthcare and how it compares and contrasts with Western biomedicine, we must begin by understanding the basic assumptions, the foundational thoughts, behind each system. To do this, we must first understand how we organize and interpret reality, how we function in the world, how these systems of thought influence us. We must understand **worldview**.

Worldview defined

Everything we do in life is based on a set of presuppositions about the nature of reality, how things work, meaning of life, what is important, and what is possible. Taken together, our presuppositions are called our worldview. This is the foundation or framework for interpreting life, for making decisions. It is a roadmap, a guide for getting around in life, for interpreting reality, and for making choices.

A world view is a way of looking at life. It is the framework into which we fit our beliefs and ideas, our ways of doing things, and judgments concerning truth and

Most of us catch our opinions by contagion.
Samuel Johnson

error, right and wrong. A world view attaches meaning and purpose to history and assigns values to persons, objects, and events. (Fountain, p. 31)

We awaken each day with the assumption that the laws of physics work today just the same as they did yesterday; we believe that the world is rational, orderly, and predictable. We believe that the cause-and-effect relationships we observe will happen the same way next time.

People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize. By presuppositions we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic world view, the grid through which he sees the world. Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People's presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions.... Most people catch their presuppositions from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches measles. But people with more understanding realize that their presuppositions should be chosen after a careful consideration of what world view is true. (Schaeffer, pp. 19-20)

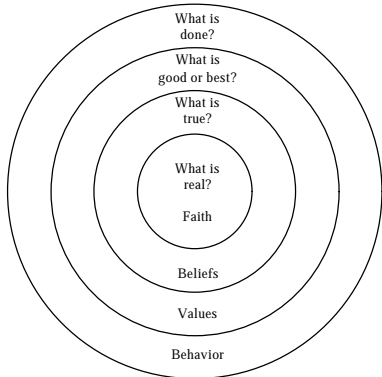


Figure 2-1
Adapted from Fountain

Most people never stop to consider their most basic assumptions. People get their worldview from their parents, school, and culture. The problem is, everything depends on our worldview. Our beliefs and values flow from our concept of reality and the nature of things. Habits and behavior are based on our values and beliefs (Figure 2-1; 2 Peter 1:5-7).

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 2 Pet 1:5-7

At the most basic level, our worldview is really our answer to three basic issues:

1. **Where did we come from and who are we (*creation*)?**
2. **What has gone wrong with the world (*fall*)?**
3. **What can we do to fix it (*redemption*)?**

From these core presuppositions flow belief, values, attitudes, and actions.

Christianity as a worldview

As we discussed in the Introduction, God says a lot about our worldview. We are to have God's perspective about everything; we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

In chapter 1 of John's gospel, he refers to Jesus as the *logos*. The Greek word *logos* means central organizing principle of reality, the embodiment of reason and logic, that which brought order and harmony to the universe.

◇ What does it mean that Jesus is the *logos*? See also Colossians 1:16-17

Christianity is much more than a religious system, speaking of spiritual matters only. All truth is God's truth, as the church fathers said. Our understanding of everything in life must be founded on certain truths about the nature and meaning of life and the universe.

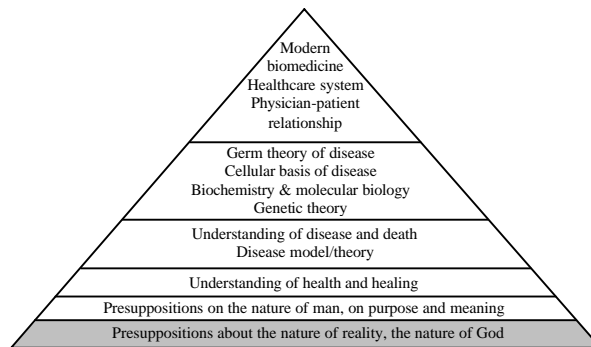


Figure 2-2: Worldview Level 1

Components of a Christian worldview: Level 1

What are the components of a Christian worldview? What are Biblical truths about the nature of reality, the nature and character of God,?

First, the very **nature** of a Christian worldview *seems* radically different than that of any other (we will see later that it is really no different in its nature).

Credo ut intelligam.
(I believe in order to know). St. Augustine

The Christian worldview starts with certain *a priori* assumptions that can never be “proven” or demonstrated “beyond a shadow of a doubt.” The Christian worldview and those who hold to it place faith in God, in His Word, and in revealed Truth as a valid means of certain knowledge. (The truth is that the starting point of any worldview is an issue of faith, of *a priori* assumptions; most people just don’t realize it or are not willing to admit it).

With that as a starting point, what are the components of a Christian worldview?

The nature of God

God is self-existent, eternal, infinite, self-sustaining, and necessary (there is no possibility of Him ceasing to exist). He is the Ultimate Reality. He is *necessary being*, meaning that His existence is not contingent upon anything or anyone else. See Psalm 90:1-4, 102:25-27, John 1:1-3, 5:26, Colossians 1:16-17.

The nature of creation

God, the necessary being, created *ex nihilo* the universe, space-time, and everything in it. The universe is *contingent being*; it is not self-existent. The universe's existence is contingent upon God creating it. See Gen 1,2, John 1:1-3, and Psalm 148.

The Sovereignty of God

God is in control, and He is involved in the world. There is perhaps no idea about God that is more pervasive in the Bible. He is sovereign over all He has made, and is personally involved in the world and in the lives of the creatures He has made.

God the Sustainer

God that not only created the universe but also sustains it. See Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 1:3, Acts 17:25, 28. He both created physical laws (rational universe), and can also supercede these at will. This is perhaps best demonstrated in that He defeated death, the ultimate natural order of things. The Scripture is full of miracles that transgress and transcend the physical laws of the universe, including the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

Creation reveals God's nature and character

God's character is woven into the very design of the universe, the fabric of space and time. The created world has an intrinsic goodness because it was created by God, though effected by the fall. See Acts 17:22-31, Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1-6.

Rational, ordered universe

God created a rational, ordered, predictable universe which can be investigated and known. Investigating the nature of the universe is a means to understanding and knowing God.

Absolute truth

Because a rational Creator created a rational, ordered universe, then there is such a thing as truth. Truth is unchanging and absolute. In the material world these truths are laws – the law of gravity, the laws of motion, etc. – and are constant unless God miraculously

supercedes them. There are also absolute moral laws, also reflecting the character and nature of God.

Unity of spiritual and physical worlds

There is a reality beyond what we see, beyond the material world. There is also a spiritual reality. The physical substance of this spiritual reality and the interplay between these two realms of reality is beyond our comprehension. We do see, however, that it is just as real and true as the material world, and that there is interaction between the two. See Ephesians 6:10-18 on spiritual warfare, 2 Kings 6:14-17 for the presence of God's spiritual army on the earth, and Daniel 10:10-14 for angels doing spiritual battle. God is Spirit (John 4:24) and He reigns and rules from heaven (Isaiah 66:1-2).

The Physical Realm is Designed to Reflect the Spiritual Realm (Reality)

This is a key concept in understanding Biblical health care. God uses the things of the physical realm to mirror greater spiritual truths, thus revealing Himself and His attributes to man, and also working in the lives of His creatures.

One example given in Scripture is that of Israel's sacrificial system. The earthly priests "serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 8:5). Indeed, "Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation" (Hebrews 9:11). He goes on to say that the law is "a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Hebrews 10:1). Paul said that the law "was our tutor to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 4:24). Paul says that things in the material world "are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:17) and in this life we only live (know, prophesy) "in part. But when that which is perfect [or complete] has come, then that which is in part will be done away with" (1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

Another example is how God created Himself into the fabric of the universe. In Proverbs, it says that wisdom was before the beginning of time, and was with God when He created the universe. Wisdom is described as being beside God as "a master craftsman" at creation (Proverbs 8:30). So God wove Himself into the design of the universe. This brings new meaning to Paul's statement that Jesus became for us "wisdom from God" (1 Corinthians 1:30; see also 1:24, Colossians 2:3). Jesus, God made man, is the ultimate example of the use of the physical to reveal the spiritual, for He was the synthesis of the physical and spiritual realms.

Worldview and Science

Science is heavily dependent upon worldview, upon fundamental presuppositions about the nature of matter, reality, and time. Although many want to believe that science is somehow completely objective and free from any presupposition, this is actually an impossibility. Both theoretical and applied science depend on worldview. We will examine this in depth in the next section.

Worldview and Medicine

Modern medicine, like science itself, is built on a certain worldview, a set of fundamental presuppositions. This is true both of the science of medicine, and in the art of patient care. The following two excerpts illustrate this point well.

One day, while I was conducting a public-health seminar on cross-cultural medicine, it suddenly occurred to me that the central belief of our medical culture was disease! Then it followed that modern concepts of disease are not “the Truth” but simply a useful way of organizing observations of reality. The constructs of disease, as physicians learn them, are as surely a belief system as are the constructs of yin and yang found in classical Chinese medicine. They are ways of organizing and thinking about the amorphous manifestations of illness that patients bring to the doctor.... The discovery that constructs of disease are essentially a belief system was a revelation to me, since it tended to contradict the long, intensive technological training centered around disease that all physicians receive. (Cassell pp. 15-16)

Popular culture views science as fundamentally independent of other fields of knowledge. Science is taken to be objective and certain, untainted by the relativism and subjectivity of other disciplines. Our own medical curricula reflect this split between “science” and “non-science.” ... This radical division between “science” and “non-science” is a false one. Science is not simply a cataloging of hard facts. It is an enterprise that is permeated with supposition. Paradigms, language, metaphysics, and cultural values all shape the conduct of science, perhaps as much as the “facts” themselves....

Paradigms set the meaning of the most fundamental terms of a science. Concepts of disease and health are defined prior to experiment. Core values and beliefs establish the boundaries of legitimate research, dictating which questions are “medical,” which hunches are testworthy, which studies are fundable.

Being conjoined with the basic operations of science, a paradigm seems commonsensical and is generally taken for granted. Our most important assumptions are rarely the topic of discussion or the focus of research. Reflection upon the prevailing paradigm occurs only by special effort, yet such reflection reveals the built-in uses and limits of the current way of thinking....

Our most basic concepts influence our work as medical scientists and clinicians. Consider illness: Is it an unfortunate aberration, a non-essential, a plague to be eliminated in some future utopia? Or can illness ever be integral to the biology of health – compensatory, necessary, reflective of an unrecognized process? Can there be biological or even non-biological purpose in illness?

Are our diseases entities that attack from outside, challenging us to wage war? Are they inner betrayals of tucked-away genes or submerged unconscious complexes? Or are they aspects of self, manifestations of personal destiny?

Does the reality of disease exist independently of culture? Do we recognize an illness only when it violates our sentiments about convenience, pleasure, or beauty? Does a condition become a disease because it can be influenced pharmaceutically?

Answers to these many questions about sickness can never be experimentally proven by medical science. Nevertheless, presumed answers are incorporated into the science's very structure....

Scientific knowledge is deeply informed by beliefs, attitudes, and values. Our most basic assumptions about illness and health determine the course of medical research and practice. The conventional division between "science" and "non-science" is false and dangerous; dogma results from the confusion of theory with fact. (Rosenzweig)

So all things, even science and medicine, depend on worldview, our framework, our fundamental presuppositions. And these presuppositions operate below the level of awareness of most people. In order to construct our Biblical framework, we must first deconstruct our unbiblical one. If we want our house built on a solid foundation, we have to investigate the current foundation and make some repairs.

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