

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Engagement

Topic: Introduction to Worldviews

4th Semester / Spring 2025

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topic tonight is an introduction to worldviews.

Introduction

While many people have a vague idea of a worldview, there is no uniform definition of worldview accepted by all people. The authors of *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World* define a worldview as "the conceptual lens through which we see, understand, and interpret the world and our place within it."

There are two different, legitimate, related ways to talk about worldviews. We can speak of worldviews at either the cultural or sub-cultural level (**communal worldviews**). We can also speak of **individual worldviews**, where a worldview is more or less a synonym for one's point-of-view. The worldview that is implicit in a given culture or subculture, the communal worldview, necessarily influences the worldviews of the individuals who are part of that community. Other factors can also influence an individual's worldview, include ways of thinking that might be alien to his or her culture—like a philosophical system or a religion.

Communal Worldviews

According to biblical scholar N. T. Wright, worldviews concern the "presuppositional, pre-cognitive stage of a culture or society." Wright further argues that there are four things which worldviews characteristically do, and they all overlap a bit.

- 1) Worldviews provide the stories through which human beings view reality
- 2) Worldviews frame the questions we ask about ultimate matters

- 3) Worldviews are communicated through symbols which often function as boundary-markers that determine who is inside the culture and who is outside the culture
- 4) Worldviews influence praxis, which is our way-of-being-in-the-world

As Wright argues: "Worldviews are thus the basic stuff of human existence, the lens through which the world is seen, the blueprint for how one should live in it, and above all the sense of identity and place which enables human beings to be what they are."

Apologist James Sire argues that worldviews often overlap with both philosophy and religion. In *The Universe Next Door*, he offers a "worldview catalog" that discusses ten worldviews and evaluates them from a Christian perspective.

- Christian Theism
- Deism
- Naturalism
- Nihilism
- Existentialism
- Eastern monism
- New Age philosophy
- Postmodernism
- Islamic Theism

Philosopher Charles Taylor discusses a concept he calls **social imaginaries**, which could be summarized as how people imagine the world to be and think and act in light of that image. Taylor prefers the term *social imaginary* for three reasons:

- (i) because I am talking about the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressive in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legend, etc. But it is also the case that
- (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

Individual worldviews are shaped by communal worldviews, though each person's worldview is a little bit different because every human is unique, thinks for him- or herself, is not always consistent in his or her thinking, and has been influenced by experiences that might differ from others around them. James Sire developed a list of basic worldview questions. He argues all people are asking these sorts of questions, even if it's only implicit, and how one answers these questions demonstrates what he or she believes to be true of the world.

- (1) What is prime reality—the really real?
- (2) What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
- (3) What is a human being?
- (4) What happens to a person at death?
- (5) Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- (6) How do we know what is right and wrong?
- (7) What is the meaning of human history?
- (8) What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

Missiologist J. H. Bavinck agreed that cultures and subcultures are characterized by worldviews, but he argued few individuals have a fully developed worldview. Bavinck believed all individuals possess a **worldvision**, but he claimed that a worldvision isn't the same thing as a worldview.

[A] worldvision is a set of intuitions about the world formed in all individuals by their family and home environment, their teachers and education, and the broad culture within which they live. It is also closely bound to the idiosyncrasies of an individual person's temperament. That particular combination provides a workable (albeit limited) frame of reference with which to live from day to day. Indeed, it is possible to spend the entirety of your life only looking at life and the world through the single lens that is your worldvision.

Everyone at least has an unreflective, reflexive worldview that is largely a result of our conditioning. But a mature worldview strives to be objective rather than subjective. It strives to be convictional rather than instinctual. It strives to be coherent rather than incoherent.

[illegible]

As Paul writes,

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8)

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (1 Cor. 2:12)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5)

Recommended Resources

CSB Worldview Study Bible (Holman, 2018).

David Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., *Christian Worldview Handbook* (Holman, 2019).

Tawa J. Anderson, Michael W. Clark, and David K. Naugle, *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World* (IVP Academic, 2017).

Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Tyndale, 1999).

Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Baker Academic, 2008).

Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide* (Crossway, 2013).

James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 6th ed. (IVP Academic, 2020).

James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, 2nd ed.