



CENTER FOR
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

AN INTRODUCTION TO

WORLDVIEW

by David Closson



CENTER FOR BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Center for Biblical Worldview is to equip Christians with a biblical worldview and train them to advance and defend the faith in their families, communities, and the public square.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that Jesus Christ created all things and rules all things and that He Himself is truth. We believe the Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word and that submitting our lives to it should be the goal of everyone who seeks to follow Christ. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible offers the most rational and satisfying answers to life's most fundamental questions, including:

- Why are we here?
- What has gone wrong with our world?
- Is there any hope?
- How does it all end?

We believe a person exhibits a biblical worldview when their beliefs and actions are aligned with the Bible, acknowledging its truth and applicability to every area of life.

AN INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEW:
REFINING THE LENS THROUGH WHICH YOU SEE EVERYTHING
BY DAVID CLOSSON

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AN INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEW:

REFINING THE LENS THROUGH
WHICH YOU SEE EVERYTHING

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Everyone has a set of fundamental beliefs and convictions that shape the way they live. This set of beliefs is called a “worldview.” A worldview shaped by the tenets of the Bible can be referred to as a “biblical worldview.”

This publication exists to help you understand what a worldview is and why it is important to have a fully formulated and cohesive one. Here’s what to expect:

- A brief exploration of some of today’s most prominent worldviews and how each answers life’s most important questions about:
 - the origin and purpose of life,
 - the existence of evil,
 - the nature of hope, and
 - what happens after death.
- A case for why the Bible offers the most rational and compelling answers to these questions.
- An analysis of the state of worldview in the United States and the church.
- A summarization of what George Barna argues are the “seven cornerstones of a biblical worldview” (*i.e.*, basic tenets of Christianity that, if embraced, essentially determine “one’s ability and likelihood of developing a biblical mind and lifestyle”).¹

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORLDVIEW

Although people have possessed worldviews since the beginning of human history, the term “worldview” is relatively new. It originated during an intellectual movement known as German Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The term is derived from the German word *Weltanschauung*, a combination of *Welt* (world) and *Anschauung* (view). German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) first used it in 1790 to refer to an individual’s perception of the world. A generation later, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) used worldview in reference to the fundamental perspective that undergirds a person’s self-understanding. Kierkegaard believed that worldview unifies a person’s thoughts and actions.²

Around the end of the nineteenth century, Christian thinkers began using the term worldview when explaining and defending their faith. Among the first to do so were James Orr (1844-1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Orr, a Presbyterian minister and professor, believed that Christianity addressed all major issues of human concern in a coherent, systematic way. Kuyper, a Calvinist theologian and one-time Dutch prime minister, believed that Calvinistic Christianity, in particular, provided a comprehensive worldview because it addressed the “three fundamental relations of all human existence: [that is to



OUR WORLDVIEW ORGANIZES, REGULATES, AND ESTABLISHES OUR BELIEFS ABOUT EVERYTHING.

say], our relation to God, to man, and to the world.”³ In short, both men believed that Christianity provided a complete view of reality. Their approach to seeing the world from a Christian point of view has been carried forward into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by other thinkers, including Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003), and Charles Colson (1931-2012).

DEFINING WORLDVIEW

According to researcher George Barna, a worldview is “the intellectual, moral, emotional and spiritual filter” through which we understand, interpret, and respond to every reality that we experience.⁴ In other words, our worldview organizes, regulates, and establishes our beliefs about everything.

Similarly, James Sire, a Christian author, apologist, and former editor of InterVarsity Press, says:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁵

According to Sire, a worldview consists of a person’s most fundamental commitments and orientation to reality. A worldview is what we presuppose; it is the lens through which we interpret everything that happens in our lives.

Here are some important features of a worldview to keep in mind:

A Worldview Is Comprehensive

A worldview is not merely a cognitive or intellectual exercise; it includes our entire perspective on life, including what we love and worship. A worldview is a matter of both head and heart.

A Worldview Shapes Values and Behavior

Every person lives and behaves according to a worldview—even if it is subconsciously developed or ill-informed. Even people who have not spent much time reflecting on what they believe are nevertheless ordering their lives around certain assumptions they have made. These assumptions inform values, which in turn affect how each person lives.

A Person's Worldview Isn't Always Logically Consistent or Applied Consistently

Many people hold a worldview that is logically inconsistent. For example, a 2021 study showed that even though only one percent of Americans embrace postmodernism as their worldview, 62 percent subscribe to the postmodern idea that “having faith matters more than which faith you have.” Even 42 percent of those who qualify as having a biblical worldview per George Barna’s American Worldview Inventory told researchers they subscribe to this inclusive religious thinking (despite the Bible teaching in John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 that there is only one way of salvation). Similarly, 52 percent of people who scored high enough to qualify as having a biblical worldview nevertheless believe that humanity is “basically good,” a notion that contradicts the Bible’s foundational teaching on the fall of Adam and Eve and original sin.⁶

Furthermore, even if a person possesses logically consistent beliefs, they might not always apply them consistently.

For example, someone with internally high moral standards who believes cheating is wrong might nevertheless talk themselves into believing that cheating is justified in a particular case, especially if they suspect someone cheated them first.



QUESTIONS EVERY WORLDVIEW NEEDS TO ANSWER

Most of us have wrestled with questions about the meaning of life at one time or another. Questions like:

- Why are we here?
- What has gone wrong with our world?
- Is there any hope?
- How does it all end?

Despite the universality and fundamental nature of these questions, many people fail to persevere long enough in their thinking to arrive at meaningful and consistent answers. We easily get distracted by the daily rhythms and demands of life and fail to reflect adequately on the purpose of it all. Often, life's big questions about purpose, meaning, and reality do not feel urgent until something disrupts our daily routine or a crisis causes us to reconsider what we had previously taken for granted. However, as these questions form the framework of every worldview, they deserve our attention and careful consideration.

Five Major Worldviews

What follows is a survey of five of the most prominent worldviews—Christianity, Islam, pantheism, naturalism, and postmodernism—and how they each answer life’s most fundamental questions. Familiarity with these worldviews will help you understand and assess your own worldview better, as well as help you thoughtfully engage with others.

Christianity

The word “Christian” is derived from combining the name *Christ* (from the Greek word meaning “anointed one” or “messiah”) and the suffix *-ian* (“to have the same qualities as”).⁷ In short, Christians are those who put their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and seek to imitate His character.



One-third of the global population describes themselves as Christian, making Christianity the world’s largest religion.⁸ Christianity is a theistic religion. Theistic religions believe in the existence of a god (or gods) who is distinct from the world. Because Christianity believes in the existence of only one God, it is more specifically a monotheistic religion.⁹ Additionally, Christianity teaches that God is personal (*i.e.*, a being one can know and be in relationship with) and triune (*i.e.*, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).¹⁰ Christianity’s sacred text is the Bible, consisting of both the Old and New Testaments. There are various traditions within Christianity, including Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodox.

It is worth noting that Christianity has its origins in and shares much of its sacred text with Judaism (*i.e.*, the Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh). Therefore, there are some commonalities between a Christian worldview and a Jewish one,

particularly in the way both religions understand why we are here (creation) and what has gone wrong with the world (sin). However, the two religions diverge significantly on where they locate their source of hope. This is because Christians ultimately place their hope in Jesus Christ as being the promised messiah (*mashiach*, meaning “anointed one” or “chosen one” in Hebrew), whereas practicing Jews believe the promised messiah is still to come. The commonalities between the two worldviews are significant enough that they are often linked together to form the adjective “Judeo-Christian.” However, for the purposes of this publication, we will be using “biblical worldview” to refer to what Christians believe God has revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

Islam

Islam (derived from the Arabic word *aslama*, meaning “submission”) originated in seventh-century Arabia with the prophet Muhammad (c. 570-632), who outlined the religion’s beliefs in its most sacred text, the Quran (“recitation” in Arabic). Islam is a monotheistic religion that sees submission to god, or *Allah* (the Arabic word for god), as the primary purpose of created beings. Unlike the Bible’s teaching about God, Allah is not triune or personal.¹¹



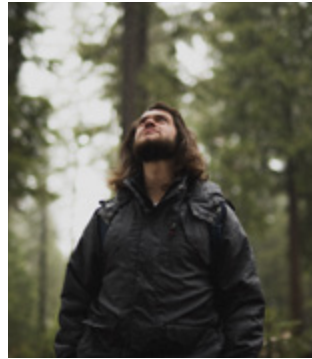
Adherents of Islam are called Muslims (“one who submits [to god]” in Arabic) and account for approximately one-quarter of the global population, making Islam the world’s second-largest religion.¹² Islam is especially prevalent in Southeast Asia and the Middle East but has spread widely to China, Europe, and Africa.

There are two main sects within Islam: Sunni and Shia. Sunni Muslims constitute 85 to 90 percent of Muslims, while Shia Muslims make up about 10 percent.¹³ Both Sunni and Shia Muslims trace the origins of their religion to Muhammad’s

revelation. However, Sunni and Shia Muslims differ in regard to who they believe is Muhammad's legitimate successor. After Muhammad's death, those who eventually became known as Sunnis believed their new leader should be elected from among the prophet's most capable and pious followers. Conversely, those known today as Shias thought Muhammad's successor should come from the prophet's family. Other differences between the two groups revolve around the degree of authority of secondary Islamic literature and differing views on religious hierarchy.¹⁴

Pantheism

The English word "pantheism" is derived from the Greek roots *pan* (all) and *theos* (god), which together mean "all is god." Due to the wide array of belief systems that can fall under the umbrella of pantheism, it can be difficult to summarize them all as a group without oversimplifying what each believes. However, all pantheists generally share four foundational commitments:



1. Pantheists revere the universe and believe it should be the focus of awe and wonder.
2. Pantheists do not believe in a personal god who created the world or who will judge humanity after death. Rather, the universe as a whole is god. To put it another way, there is "no god but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe."¹⁵
3. Pantheists believe how people live (ethics) is up to each individual but ought to be informed by the fact that everyone and everything is connected.
4. Pantheists do not believe in an afterlife; they believe death marks the end of individual existence (although some pantheists believe in a form of reincarnation).

Pantheists disagree over whether the universe consists of soul and matter or simply matter. Whereas dualist pantheists believe that spirit and matter are separate substances and that the universe contains some type of cosmic soul or mind, physicalist pantheists believe that the universe consists of one substance and that everything has a physical basis.¹⁶

Hinduism, the world's third-largest religion, contains some pantheistic schools of thought. One prominent example of pantheistic Hinduism is Advaita Vedanta, which teaches that everything is part of god or the ultimate reality (*Brahman*).¹⁷ Pantheistic ideas are also present in Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Sufism (a form of Islamic mysticism).

Naturalism

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines naturalism as “the doctrine that scientific laws are adequate to account for all phenomena.”¹⁸

Naturalists believe that everything can be explained through natural causes (as opposed to supernatural ones). The naturalistic worldview

has various ideological branches and expressions. Among the most prominent are materialism, Social Darwinism, secular humanism, and Marxism.



- *Materialism*: Although naturalism says everything can be explained through natural causes, materialism goes a step further and says *only* material things (*i.e.*, things that have mass and volume) exist. Materialists believe everything in the universe and every aspect of human experience is or can be reduced to matter and energy.
- *Social Darwinism*: This theory posits that humanity is subject to the same laws that Charles Darwin (1809-1882) perceived to govern plants and animals in nature.

Evolutionary theories such as natural selection (*i.e.*, “survival of the fittest”) are said to explain human interaction and behavior.

- *Secular humanism*: Secular humanism supposes humanity as the measure of all things (*e.g.*, truth, morality). Adherents to this philosophy believe morality and personal fulfillment are possible outside of religion. They reject the existence of the spiritual and eternal, choosing to focus on maximizing this present life since they believe this present life is all there is.¹⁹
- *Marxism*: A socioeconomic offshoot of materialism, Marxism is a school of thought developed primarily by Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the mid-nineteenth century. A central motif in Marxism is class struggle, defined as the ongoing tension between oppressor and oppressed. Offshoots of Marxism include critical theory (including Critical Race Theory), a philosophy that believes societal problems are the result of existing power structures. Critical theory “critiques” these structures and seeks to overcome them. (This approach to philosophy is also seen in postmodernism.)

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an intellectual and philosophical movement defined by its rejection of modernism.

Whereas modernism, originating in the Enlightenment era of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, believed that reason and science could be used to establish objective and universal truths, postmodernism

argues that there are no universal, objective means of determining truth. Whereas modernism rejected divine revelation (*e.g.*, the Bible) as a source of objective truth, postmodernism rejects the concept of objective truth itself.



Forerunners of postmodern thought include the German philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Common tenets of postmodernism are perspectivism (truth is up to each individual's perspective; there is no fixed nature or "facts")²⁰ and deconstructionism (a written text has no fixed meaning and is actually a cover for power plays—not a vehicle for truth but rather for exercising and extending domination).²¹

Syncretism

Surveys show that very few people today actually hold a logically coherent or systematic belief system. In fact, as we will discuss later, one of the most commonly held worldviews today is actually a hybrid of two or more worldviews. This blending of worldviews is known as syncretism (a worldview made up of a mixture of beliefs and values based on personal preference).



That being said, the five aforementioned worldviews collectively function as a jumping-off point for understanding most belief systems, and even hybrid worldviews tend to incorporate elements of at least one of these five. Each of these worldviews have very different conceptions of reality and the world and therefore differ in their answers to life's biggest questions.

BIG QUESTION #1: WHY ARE WE HERE?

This section will explore how each of the five worldviews answers the fundamental question, "Why are we here?" This question can be broken down into two sub-questions:

- How do we (and the world) exist?
- For what purpose do we exist?

The way our worldview answers these questions greatly influences how we live and the choices we make.



Christianity and the Origins and Meaning of Life

Christianity's explanation for the origin of life is found in the very first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).²² Genesis 1-2 teach that God created the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo* in Latin), and Hebrews 1:3 says He continuously sustains it.²³ An important implication of the biblical view of creation is that the Creator is distinct from the creation. Unlike His creation, God is uncreated, eternal, infinite, omnipotent, and self-sustaining.

The Bible's teaching about creation has implications for what Christians understand about the meaning and purpose of life. Notably, the Bible teaches that God created humanity in His image (*imago Dei* in Latin; Gen. 1:26-27). Like a statue erected by an ancient king bearing his image and signifying his rule, humanity bears God's image in the world, representing His authority and reflecting aspects of His own character. The Bible also teaches that God has endowed humanity with a conscience, an internal rational and moral capacity that can distinguish between what is right and wrong (Rom. 2:15, 1 Tim. 1:5). This is why Christians have taught that even those who have never read the Bible or had a personal relationship with God can recognize the existence of universal rights or wrongs.

Additionally, Christianity rejects the negative spirit-matter dualism present in other worldviews. Whereas some worldviews

(both ancient and modern) see the physical realm as inherently defiled or an illusion humanity must transcend, the Bible affirms the goodness of creation (Gen. 1). In terms of human nature, Christians believe that humans are constituted of both body and soul, a material and an immaterial element (1 Thes. 5:23). While perspectives influenced by Gnosticism view the body as a prison from which the soul must escape, Christians affirm the goodness of the physical body and the immaterial soul.²⁴

The Bible teaches that people are created to glorify God with their bodies and souls. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the chief end of man is to “glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”²⁵ Humans exist to mimic or mirror God’s character, and they can live out this purpose no matter their immediate occupation or life circumstances.

In sum, the biblical worldview teaches that every person is created and sustained by God and exists to reflect His character with their lives. Human beings are not accidents; human existence is the result of God’s purpose and intention.

Islam and the Origins and Meaning of Life

Islam teaches that Allah created the world, but Islam does not share the exact same creation account as Christianity. Although there are similarities between the accounts, important distinctions influence each worldview’s understanding of individual purpose and meaning.

In Islam, Allah is the all-powerful creator who spoke with authority and brought the universe and the earth into existence (Quran 2:117). Although there is no detailed creation account in the Quran, and even though passages in the Quran seem to differ on the process, the common Muslim belief is that Allah created the world in six days or periods of time (the Arabic word for “day” can refer to an eon or any period of time).²⁶ Unlike the biblical account, which says God rested on the seventh day

(Gen. 2:2-3), the Quran notes, “We [Allah] created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us” (Quran 50:38).²⁷ This statement is possibly intended to contrast with the Bible’s account of creation and present an unwearied Allah as superior to the Judeo-Christian concept of God.

Islam teaches that Allah made Adam in his picture or image. While most Muslims agree that this teaching means Allah formed man in a different way than the rest of creation, there is no consensus on how man uniquely images or pictures Allah.²⁸ Also, there is no detailed account of Eve’s creation in the Quran.

In Islam, the purpose of life is to honor Allah in all areas of life. This is accomplished by submitting to his commands as they are taught in the Quran and modeled in the life of Muhammad. All Muslim men and women are commanded to fulfill the Five Pillars of Islam, the five basic acts of religious devotion that identify the individual Muslim and the global Muslim community. We will examine the Five Pillars in our discussion about Islam and hope.

Pantheism and the Origins and Meaning of Life

Pantheists account for the origin of the universe in various ways.²⁹ A few of these options include:

- *The universe always existed:* Some pantheists believe the universe had no beginning and has always existed. According to this view, the universe is self-existing; because the universe contains time and space, no cause (such as an external creator god) existed prior to the universe itself.
- *The universe began on its own:* Some pantheists believe the universe “created” itself or emerged spontaneously out of nothing or virtually nothing (e.g., a “Big Bang”). Whether the universe has always existed or emerged



from a quantum vacuum, pantheists holding to this view generally agree that evolution is the force responsible for subsequent developments, changes, and progressions that have taken place among living creatures.

- *The universe emanates from a shared origin/substance:* Some pantheists believe that the universe emanates from a common origin or single substance that remains the world's unifying principle. This cosmological theory, known as emanationism, asserts that the universe continuously multiplies and flows "outwards" in a progression or series from one divine origin point. The lowest level is matter, the material world.³⁰ This view differs from Christianity's view that the created world is "very good" (Gen. 1:31). World religions with origin accounts resembling emanationism include:
 - Taoism, which holds that the *Tao*, or the substance of everything that exists, first engenders from one to two, then from two to three, and then "three creates every being."³¹
 - Hindu traditions that believe Brahman is the binding unity or ultimate reality in the universe. According to this view, the impersonal deity or "force" of Brahman created the universe out of himself.³²

Pantheism's lack of consensus on the origins of the universe is conceded by Paul Harrison, the founder and president of the World Pantheist Movement. According to Harrison, "The mystery of the ultimate origins of our universe, before the Big

Bang, before the first tiny fraction of a nanosecond, may well remain forever unsolved. And the most basic mystery: ‘why does anything exist, rather than nothing?’ is inherently unanswerable.”³³

The World Pantheist Statement of Principles summarizes a pantheist conception of the meaning and purpose of life. It emphasizes the responsibility to “cherish, revere and preserve [nature] in all its magnificent beauty and diversity,” the obligation to “treat all living beings with compassion and respect,” and the need to “honor reality, and keep our minds open to the evidence of the senses and of science’s unending quest for deeper understanding.”³⁴

However, pantheists differ regarding whether it is the universe or the individual that produces human purpose. Dualist pantheists believe the universe may have a conscious purpose and that humans are obligated to help the universe towards this goal. Conversely, physicalist pantheists believe that the universe has no external meaning. Harrison explains this perspective: “[Physicalist pantheists] do not believe that human life has any external purpose, imposed on us by a God or a cosmic mind. But because humans are conscious, we are able to choose our own purpose in life.”³⁵

Naturalism and the Origins and Meaning of Life

From the perspective of naturalism, life is understood through the physical world. Although people may create religious systems that include gods, angels, and demons in an attempt to answer questions of ultimate meaning, naturalism asserts that there is no supernatural god or spirits, only the material elements of matter and energy.³⁶

Many naturalists rely on the theory of evolution to explain life’s origins and development. This theory posits that life began billions of years ago after a massive cosmological event (often referred to as the “Big Bang”). According to evolutionary



biologists, after this cosmological event, a series of chemical reactions gave rise to the first self-replicating molecule. All life forms can be traced back to this self-replicating molecule which, over time, became more complex. The existence of diverse life forms today is due to natural selection, random mutations, and genetic variations of these increasingly complex molecules. Famously described by Charles Darwin in his 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*, natural selection is said to be the mechanism and process responsible for passing along advantageous or desirable characteristics from one generation to another within a species and for the emergence of new species.

Although naturalists agree that evolutionary biology accounts for the diversity of life present today, there is still some uncertainty among naturalists about the very beginnings of life. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins admitted this in 1998, explaining, “By far the majority of the work in producing the elegant complexity of life is done after the origin of life, during the process of evolution. There does remain the very first step... And it’s a step which we don’t fully understand—mainly because it happened such a long time ago, and under conditions when the Earth was very different... there are various theories for how it might have happened. None of them is yet fully convincing. It may be that none of them ever will be.”³⁷

In short, not all naturalists are convinced about the genesis of biological life, but they believe that once life began, natural processes, over the course of billions of years, were responsible for life as it exists today. For naturalists, life as we know it, including humanity, is ultimately the product of purely material processes.

A logical extension of naturalism's account of origins is that many naturalists do not believe there is a universal, overarching purpose to life. While some believe a meaningful life consists of satisfying personal goals or pursuing activities that confer meaning on life, others equate a meaningful life with achieving a desirable mental state. In short, while there are competing conceptions within naturalism on what constitutes a meaningful life, there is agreement that meaning and purpose are not determined by religious teachings or supernatural beings.³⁸

Social Darwinism, the theory suggesting that human civilizations are subject to the same laws of natural selection found in nature, suggests that only the fittest survive; thus, life is a process of eliminating the “weak” and elevating the “strong.” Everything we do in a civilization—good or bad—results from the instinct to survive and even dominate.³⁹ Other naturalists are more altruistic and aim to make the most of life by devoting themselves to whatever they deem worthwhile.

Postmodernism and the Origins and Meaning of Life

Postmodernism regards with suspicion any system—religious or philosophical—that claims objectively true explanations about the world. As philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) once quipped, “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity towards metanarratives.”⁴⁰ (Metanarratives are overarching accounts of the way things are and where they are going.)

Based on its rejection of metanarratives, it should come as no surprise that postmodernism has no origin or creation story. Moreover, even the most cherished scientific theories are relative, culture-bound constructs.⁴¹ However, it is worth noting that although postmodernism rejects overarching origin stories, there are examples in which postmodern thinkers display an affinity or appreciation for evolution in their writings.⁴²

For example, philosopher Richard Rorty (1931–2007) praised

Daniel Dennett's 1995 book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, which defends natural selection.⁴³

Along these lines, there is no overarching purpose for life within the postmodern worldview. Because truth does not exist independently of individual perspectives or interests, the meaning of life is different for each person. In other words, with no outside authority setting the terms or dictating a standard for how people ought to live, humanity's only real duty or responsibility is living "your truth," whatever that truth is.

BIG QUESTION #2: WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

This section will explore what each of the five worldviews believes about evil, as well as the explanation each worldview gives for the existence of pain and suffering in the world. Although some worldviews believe evil is an illusion, most people agree that something is wrong with the world. Moreover, many people, if they are honest, will readily admit that something has gone wrong within us as well.



Christianity and Evil

The Bible teaches that pain and suffering were brought into the world by humanity's decision to disobey God. In Genesis 1-2, we read the historical account of how God created a perfect world and the first human couple. Endowed with moral agency, Adam and Eve could choose whether to follow God's commands or not. They were given one clear prohibition: "You may surely eat of

every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

Adam and Eve had a choice. If they had made the right choice and trusted God, they would have lived forever in the garden—pain- and evil-free—enjoying close communion with God. However, Adam and Eve listened to the fallen angel Satan and his lie that God had withheld something good from them, chose to disobey God, and ate the forbidden fruit. This single act of rebellion brought about massive consequences for all creation and damaged humanity’s fellowship with God. In theological terms, Adam and Eve’s disobedience was sin (*i.e.*, a violation and transgression of God’s law).

In Romans 5, the apostle Paul explains how, as humanity’s representative, Adam’s sin was passed down to his descendants: “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). The entire human race has followed in Adam’s footsteps and sinned against God. And as God warned in Genesis 2:17, the consequence of sin is physical and spiritual death (Rom. 6:23).

Separation from God—the source of life—manifested itself throughout creation. In addition to the fracturing of the relationship between God and mankind, the ground was cursed, work was plagued with frustration and futility, childbirth became painful, and the intimate relationship between husbands and wives was afflicted with conflict and rivalry. Tyrannical despots, genocide, destructive uses of technology, misuse of authority, and the prevalence of sickness and disease are other ways sin plagues our lives. In short, heartache, suffering, and pain now characterize the human condition, and as the Bible puts it, creation itself “groans” under the weight of sin (Rom. 8:22) as it fails to reach its full potential.⁴⁴

The biblical worldview does not shy away from the topic of evil. Although many people are quick to put God on trial for the wickedness they see around them, the Bible makes it clear that evil is the result of humanity's decision to rebel against God. Mankind, not God, is responsible for sin and the broken relationship between Creator and image-bearer. Theologian Philip Ryken puts it simply: "The reason we do all the wrong things we do is that we do not have a right relationship with God."⁴⁵

Islam and Evil

According to the Quran, evil originates from Satan's refusal to obey Allah's command and prostrate himself before Adam out of respect. For his arrogance and insubordination, Satan (also known as Iblis) was cast out of heaven until the Day of Judgment (Quran 2:34).⁴⁶ Satan now roams the earth, enticing humans to sin and fall into disobedience through unbelief in Allah.

The Quran teaches that Adam and Eve initially lived in Paradise, happily obeying the commands of Allah. However, Satan successfully tempted them to eat the forbidden fruit. Although Allah forgave Adam and Eve for their disobedience, they were subsequently sent out from Paradise and placed on the earth, where they would have to struggle against the spirit of evil and face further temptations to rebel against the commands of Allah (Quran 7:20-25).

Although a Muslim's life is characterized by struggles against Satan and corrupt external influences, many Muslims believe Islam teaches that humanity is born in a state of innocence and



purity (known as *fitra*, Arabic for “original disposition,” Quran 30:30). This view contrasts with the Christian notion of original sin, which teaches that Adam’s sinful nature is passed down to his descendants. The Quran, however, teaches that newborn children are born in a state of purity in which they are naturally inclined to belief in Allah.⁴⁷ Children raised according to *fitra* (*i.e.*, raised as Muslim and not instructed in false beliefs and creeds), will be less likely to be misled by other religions, devils, or jinn (more on jinn below).

Additionally, the Islamic doctrine of *al-Qadar* (power) teaches that everything, whether good or evil, happens under the auspices of Allah. As the goal of life in Islam is to live in submission to Allah, Muslims believe Allah can use suffering to test faith, encourage obedience, and correct unbelief. Additionally, Allah can use evil to educate and punish. Faithful Muslims will be known by their obedience to Allah, and through their experience of evil and suffering, Allah aims to perfect the hearts of Muslims submitted to him and render them faithful. The greatest sin against Allah is unbelief (*shirk al-Akbar*), and man’s experience with suffering is meant to prevent this sin.⁴⁸

The Quran also mentions a class of spiritual beings known as the *jinn* (derived from a word that means “hidden”), whom Allah created from smokeless fire (Quran 55:15). They can do good or evil (Quran 72:10-18). Although the jinn were created to worship Allah, many of them joined Satan in his work of temptation and are “allies” to those who do not believe (Quran 51:56, 7:27). Even though the jinn do not have the same power as Allah, they can nevertheless cause great harm and are frequently blamed for sicknesses and other misfortunes in Muslim cultures outside of the West.⁴⁹

Pantheism and Evil

Central to pantheism’s understanding of evil is its rejection of a personal god. Whereas many world religions see suffering as the



result of living in a sinful world or as punishment for disobeying divine commands, pantheists understand pain, hurt, and suffering as the working out of the laws of nature. Evil exists—manifested in natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornados, and tsunamis—but these tragedies have no overarching, deeper purpose. In other words, evil is not the result of a vengeful or vindictive deity or fallen angel; evil is a term used to refer to the unpleasant and undesirable things that happen in the world.

In pantheism, evil is subjective. Some pantheists believe that evil may be part of or an expression of the divine Unity.⁵⁰ Others maintain that the concept of evil is essentially a label or category that describes phenomena or actions that cause or contribute to pain. This understanding is reflected by philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) when he notes, “We call a thing good or evil...when it increases or diminishes, helps or hinders, our power of activity. Thus, insofar as we perceive that a thing affects us with pleasure or pain, we call it good or evil...evil is in reality a lesser good; hence under the guidance of reason we seek or pursue only the greater good and the lesser evil.”⁵¹ For Spinoza, whatever diminishes or hinders pleasure or inflicts pain is evil.

Some religions influenced by pantheism explain evil in terms of karma, a law of cause and effect that posits one’s actions affect one’s future in the current life and/or determine the nature of the next life. In short, if one chooses to do something wrong, they will inevitably experience the consequences of their decision in the future; conversely, if they do something right, they will be rewarded accordingly.

There is no traditional “problem of evil” in pantheism like there is in most religions. Whereas theism posits a personal god and therefore must address questions such as, “If there is a god, why is there evil and suffering?,” pantheism rejects the idea of a personal god and lacks the foundation for having a “problem” of evil in the first place. For pantheists, what is commonly referred to as “evil” is simply the working out of nature’s laws on the social and physical structures of the world, and people should find it liberating that pain and suffering do not originate from a deity they must placate or worship.

Naturalism and Evil

Naturalism teaches that all phenomena, including natural and moral evil, can be accounted for by the laws of science and natural causes. Because of this, many of the leading atheists who subscribe to a naturalist worldview argue that the existence of natural evil is simply part of the evolutionary process. Richard Dawkins states, “I don’t believe that there is hanging out there... something called ‘good’ and something called ‘evil.’ It is solely an evolutionary convenience, there is really no such thing as good or evil.”⁵² For Dawkins, circumstances such as tsunamis and disease are natural phenomena that lack moral significance. In other words, naturalism’s appraisal of natural evil is that it is a regrettable aspect of life that humanity must learn to live with since existence itself is an outgrowth of spontaneous circumstances and evolutionary development.

Many atheists, including Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011), subscribe to a naturalistic worldview that blames religion for the world’s evils. For example, Hitchens argued that “religion poisons everything” (the title of one of his books) because it provides divine sanction for innumerable cruelties and atrocities. Moreover, according to Hitchens, religious moral codes are responsible for repressing natural sexual desires, encouraging higher rates of greed and violence, and creating conditions that have “retarded the development of civilization.”⁵³

Related to the discussion of evil is the question of moral obligation. Because naturalists reject the notion of a higher supernatural being—or anything spiritual—how do those who hold this worldview ground morals or, more specifically, moral obligation? For example, why is one obliged to be a good citizen or to be faithful to one’s spouse? From the naturalist point of view, since no authoritative lawgiver exists outside the time-space universe that we live in, the presence of any moral code is the result of human invention. In other words, there is no clear reason for humans to be “ethical” except to survive and acquire material and relational benefits.



Additionally, in their accounting for ethical behavior, naturalists believe that prudential principles inevitably govern relationships within groups. Despite lacking a specific grounding for morality, many naturalists believe people are fundamentally good and that moral norms serve a societal purpose. As a result, different cultures create moral codes to govern behavior within their group. Violations of these norms are considered wrong by those inside the community. Although these codes are not universal, most naturalists agree that some principles generally apply across time and culture (*e.g.*, prohibitions against killing or stealing). Whether called natural law or commonsense, these principles provide order to society and are thus adopted. For many naturalists, the origin of these laws or standards can be traced to basic needs for order and stability that inevitably rise as humanity progresses.

In summary, even though most leading naturalists do not ascribe a deeper purpose to evil and suffering, they acknowledge its existence as part of the fabric of life that they hope will be overcome as the human race advances and evolves.

Postmodernism and Evil

Postmodernism's rejection of absolute truth and its view of individual autonomy shapes its views on evil and suffering. Within the postmodernist worldview, there is no objective basis or outside authority to ground morality and determine what is right. If each person is uniquely situated and has their own perspective on right and wrong, in theory, everyone could have a different definition and standard for what is morally right and wrong. Thus, within postmodernism, no single view of morality can be more correct than any other.

When it comes to addressing perceived evils or injustices, many postmodernists rely on critical theory, which views power structures as responsible for society's problems. According to critical theory, social problems arise from institutions (especially religious ones), societal structures, and dominant cultural assumptions. From the critical theory perspective, privileged social groups wield and maintain power by controlling society's institutions and leveraging them to impose their morality on others (especially religious, sexual, and ideological minorities).



Postmodernists view these power dynamics as a form of social oppression. Since there is no objective truth in a postmodern worldview, cultural “norms” or “standards” are seen as man-made tools for domination. Postmodernists insist that people ought to be able to define their own identities, so binding and authoritative truth claims are considered especially harmful.⁵⁴

Despite postmodernism’s inability to ground morality—and thus make objective judgments on right and wrong—postmodernists still condemn what they perceive as evil or oppressive (especially beliefs or ideologies that claim truth is knowable). In fact, although postmodernism insists that the descriptor “evil” cannot refer to anything objectively wrong, some postmodernists, like many naturalists, have argued that moral truth resides in local communities. Thus, cultural relativism, or the view that truth and morals are relative to one’s community, is how some postmodernists, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty, ground moral behavior.⁵⁵ Under this framework, a wrong or evil action is one that violates a community’s agreed-upon moral code (which is constantly evolving based on the preferences of community members). Of course, insisting that a local community’s moral code has binding force runs contrary to postmodernism’s principal claim that there is no authority from which to draw ethical boundaries.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in some contexts, cultural relativism is how postmodernists determine what is right or wrong.

BIG QUESTION #3: IS THERE ANY HOPE?

As we’ve seen, most leading worldviews acknowledge and seek to provide an account for the existence of evil and suffering. Additionally, most major worldviews teach that evil can be overcome. This section will explore what these worldviews teach about hope and how these beliefs influence the lives of those who hold them.

Christianity and Hope

Christians believe that the only hope for sinful humanity is a restored relationship with God. According to the Bible, because of sin, people are spiritually dead and separated from God (Eph. 2:1-3). Humanity's default spiritual state is not merely indifference to God;

it is outright hostility toward Him (Rom. 8:7). While most non-Christians would not consider themselves God's enemy, the Bible teaches that anyone who does not repent of their sin and trust in Jesus is opposed to God (Rom. 5:10). Coupled with God's holiness and purity, man's sinfulness means that even if people could realize their dire spiritual state, they would be unable to save themselves or bridge the gap between God and themselves.



However, the Bible teaches that the triune God has taken the initiative to save and redeem lost sinners. God's initiative in salvation is succinctly explained in Romans 5:8, where Paul writes, "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is what Christians refer to as the good news of the "gospel" (an Old English translation of the Greek word *euangelion*, which means "good news").⁵⁷

Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are the heart of Christianity and central to the hope offered by the biblical worldview. God is just and must punish sin. Furthermore, God is holy and pure and cannot abide with sin (Hab. 1:13). But He is also loving and "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). This is why Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate (embodied in flesh; Phil. 2:7). Jesus lived a sinless life and died a sacrificial death as a substitute for sinners (Heb. 9:25-26). By providing a perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus removed God's wrath toward sinners and fully satisfied God's justice (1 John 4:10). Moreover, through His death and

resurrection, Jesus overcame our separation from God and provided a way for us to be reconciled with Him (2 Cor. 5:18-19).⁵⁸

The Bible presents the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the hope for sinful humanity. But how does Jesus' sacrifice benefit individual sinners?

Romans 10:9-10 answers this question by explaining that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." According to the Bible, a person is saved from the consequences of their sin (including eternal separation from God) and justified before God by repenting of their sin and putting their faith in Jesus. Any sinner who repents and turns in faith to Christ can be declared righteous because of the atoning work of Jesus. Once a person comes to faith or is "born again," as some theologians and pastors would describe the experience, God gives that person the Holy Spirit and the spiritual resources to increasingly reject wickedness and pursue holiness (John 14:16, 26). Christians then respond to God's gracious gift of salvation with worship, reverence, and gratitude.

The Bible teaches that believers can have confidence about their eternal destiny and assurance of their right standing before God (Rom. 8:38-39, 1 John 5:11-13). Not only did Jesus die a sacrificial death, but He was also raised again to new life, proving that His sacrifice was sufficient and that God's righteous judgment was satisfied. Jesus' resurrection proved His power over death, and it gives believers certainty that sin no longer has a hold over their lives (1 Cor. 15:14, 19). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that those who have placed their faith in Christ will be physically resurrected after they die and spend eternity with God in heaven (1 Cor. 15:20-22). This is the ultimate hope of Christianity—a new heaven and new earth where God dwells with His redeemed sons and daughters and where there is no mourning, crying, or pain because the curse of sin has been broken by Jesus' death and resurrection (Rev. 21:1-4).

Islam and Hope

According to Islam, one can overcome evil through belief in Allah and good works. Although the final decision to forgive sins is Allah's prerogative, the Quran teaches that those who believe and live righteously "will have hopes to be among those who achieve salvation" (Quran 28:67). In short, if one's good deeds outweigh their bad deeds, Allah may choose to extend mercy to that person and give them eternal life.



As previously mentioned, there are five practices that every Muslim must do in obedience to Allah. They are known as the Five Pillars of Islam:

1. *Shahada* (profession of faith)
Muslims must proclaim and live by the *Shahada*, a creed that is foundational to the Islamic faith: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger." This simple statement of belief is repeated every time Muslims pray.
2. *Salah* (prayer)
Muslims must participate in *Salah*, the practice of praying five times a day in the direction of the holy city of Mecca. These include prayers of confession and repentance.
3. *Zakat* (almsgiving)
Muslims must engage in *Zakat*, the giving of charitable donations to the poor and needy. This is an act of self-denial and worship.
4. *Saum* (fasting)
Muslims must observe *Saum*, the practice of fasting during the month of Ramadan. During this month, Muslims refrain from food, water, and intimate relations during daylight hours.

5. *Hajj* (pilgrimage)

Hajj is a journey to the holy city of Mecca during the first half of the last month of the lunar year. Muslims who are financially and physically able are required to complete this trip at least once in their lifetime. The great financial and physical sacrifice of *Hajj* demonstrates a Muslim's dedication to Allah.⁵⁹

Islam conveys a degree of hope that faithful Muslims will go to Paradise. However, because the ultimate decision depends upon the will of Allah, many Muslims may understandably live with uncertainty. For this reason, some Muslims seek greater assurance of salvation through death by martyrdom, giving their lives in acts of holy war or *jihad* (Arabic for “struggling” or “effort,” whether referring to internal efforts to attain righteousness or to external war waged against Allah's enemies).⁶⁰ According to the Quran, Muslims are assured they will go directly to Paradise if they die a martyr's death (Quran 9:111).

Pantheism and Hope

In religions such as Christianity and Islam, the promise of receiving forgiveness of sin, attaining personal salvation, or earning divine favor provides hope for



followers. But pantheism's rejection of a personal deity and afterlife requires that pantheists approach the search for hope differently than those accustomed to thinking in a theistic framework.

Pantheists generally agree that achieving happiness or well-being is the goal of life. As Michael Levine puts it, “For the pantheist, ‘well-being’ is the only personal form of salvation there is.”⁶¹ Although there is not a universally agreed-upon set of practices by which pantheists attain “well-being,” many pantheists place a high value on connecting with and celebrating nature.⁶²

As those who believe the universe contains a cosmic mind or soul, dualist pantheists pursue spiritual enlightenment by connecting with what they perceive as the divine unity of the cosmos. Professor Mary Poplin explains, “Pantheists achieve various degrees of ‘spiritual enlightenment’ by becoming increasingly one with the ultimate spiritual reality (Nirvana in Buddhism) or by actualizing their god-nature or real self (Atman in Hinduism, when the soul becomes united to the Brahman, the ultimate reality).”⁶³ To attain these ends, disciplines such as meditation, the study of sacred texts, chanting, and veneration of deities are useful for blocking out distractions and focusing the worshiper.

Physicalist pantheists believe that the present life is the only one they will ever experience and that it is therefore important to be present and perceive the world in all its mystery, wonder, and richness. Paul Harrison captures this view well, noting: “For physicalist pantheists the Universe simply exists. It is a cosmic dance of energy and matter, engaged in a ceaseless process of creation, destruction, and evolution, and we are part of the dance. Physicalist pantheists accept this and celebrate it.”⁶⁴ Although they lack the prospect of an afterlife, physicalist pantheists find joy and meaning in striving to live in harmony with nature and other people.

In summary, the concept of personal salvation familiar to followers of Christianity or Islam is not present in pantheism. Rather, many pantheists, particularly dualist pantheists, hope to achieve harmony at death by becoming one with the universe through reunion with the cosmos. For physicalist pantheists who do not believe in an afterlife, a meaningful life entails awareness of nature’s interconnectedness and respecting human and non-human life.



Naturalism and Hope

Those operating from a naturalist worldview believe that hope is found in the evolution and advancement of humanity. Naturalists believe that as technology, intellect, and policies continue to advance, pain and suffering will give way to an age of prosperity and flourishing.



In short, naturalists place their hope in humanity. As the Humanist Manifesto put it in 1933, “Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement.”⁶⁵ For many naturalists, realizing “the good life” means making strides in the hard sciences. As evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins explains, “Humanity’s best hope for the future is, as it has long been, science.”⁶⁶

Since advancements in natural science (particularly biology, genetics, biochemistry, and physics) have shed light on previously vexing medical, scientific, and technological problems, naturalists believe that further scientific breakthroughs can solve problems such as disease, hunger, and violence. Progress in the natural sciences spurs gains in applied sciences (medicine, engineering, etc.) and social sciences (anthropology, economics, political science, etc.), resulting in a more just, safe, and prosperous world.

Connected with naturalism’s faith in science is its rejection of religious explanations for finding hope or purpose. “No deity will save us; we must save ourselves,” states the Humanist Manifesto II, published in 1973. In the place of religion, “Technology is a

vital key to human progress and development,” explained authors Paul Kurtz (1925-2012) and Edwin Wilson (1898-1993).

“Humanity, to survive, requires bold and daring measures. We need to extend the uses of scientific method, not renounce them, to fuse reason with compassion in order to build constructive social and moral values,” they add.⁶⁷

For naturalists, hope in science is vindicated by technological advances, which have accelerated at an extraordinary rate. The luxuries of a generation or two ago are commodities that even the poorest might take for granted today. These innovations have removed certain hardships from people’s lives and provided a higher quality of life for many.

Dawkins provides a succinct summary of the hope present in naturalism: “It is science that will save us—if anything can—from the looming disaster of climate change. It is medical science that will save our lives. It is agricultural science that will feed the world. And academic science will continue to feed our minds and our aspirations as we reach deep into the large-scale grandeur of the universe ... it is science that gives me hope for the future.”⁶⁸ The salvific power of science is the great hope of the naturalist worldview. In the end, a materialistic worldview assumes that material solutions will answer all of the struggles we face.

Postmodernism and Hope

Cultural historian Robert Hewison has described postmodernism as “modernism with the optimism taken out.”⁶⁹ Whereas modernism trusts reason and embraces the scientific method as the means by which the world can be made better, postmodernism introduced a “hermeneutic of suspicion” by questioning man’s ability to know anything at all.⁷⁰



But despite casting suspicion on ultimate questions about the nature and purpose of life, postmodernism still offers a form of hope.

Those committed to a postmodern worldview often find hope in the goal of overthrowing oppressive authorities and systems. In fact, many who subscribe to a postmodern worldview believe it is appropriate, if not imperative, to reject the norms and expectations imposed by those in power. A practical way to resist unwanted standards is by deconstructing society's norm-forming institutions, especially the church. In the eyes of many postmodernists, religion is an impediment to progress, and the sooner society is freed from the shackles of man-made religion, the better.⁷¹

A postmodern attitude toward authority was expressed well by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). In a 1977 lecture at the College de France, Foucault said, "Let us sin, then, and sin to infinity. ... One must respond to every law established by the world, or by the powers of the world, by violating it, systematically breaking the law and in effect, overthrowing the reign of the one who created the world."⁷² To Foucault, laws and norms are oppressive. Moreover, the standards imposed by those in power have no objective moral value and cannot require or impose obligation. Thus, people are justified to "sin" against those in power. In fact, since postmodernism says sin is defined by those in power, mankind is compelled to confront those in authority and redefine sin in light of personal preference. As more people reject dominant assumptions and rules, the freer society will be.

Postmodernists also seek to dismantle social oppression by discrediting truth claims, particularly authoritative metanarratives. One way they do this is by undermining the ability of language to convey meaning. For postmodernists, when people talk about the world, they are not talking about objects in the world but rather their subjective interpretations of things in the world (since that is the only knowledge to which people have access).

This approach to language and literary analysis is called deconstruction and was introduced by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the 1960s. Derrida argued that language is complex and that its meaning is impossible to determine. From this perspective, an author's intended meaning is not nearly as important as a reader's interpretation of the text. In fact, the author's intent matters little (if at all) because the author's setting, culture, and situation differ from his readers'. This approach to language and written text is related to postmodernism's rejection of truth claims which, as noted previously, are viewed by postmodernists as weapons those in power use against the unsuspecting masses.⁷³

In summary, hope in postmodernism is found, in part, by freeing society of oppressive institutions and championing moral and cultural relativism. Deconstructing language, challenging those in power, and overthrowing religion are means of achieving a society where each person is free to set their own standards, meanings, and goals.

BIG QUESTION #4: HOW DOES IT ALL END?

The next section will explore what the five major worldviews teach about death. According to a 2022 study, a third of Americans admitted they are "scared to die."⁷⁴ A major reason for this fear is the looming unknown of what comes after this life. In response to this concern, every worldview has an eschatology (*i.e.*, a doctrine of "last things"), and philosophers, scientists, and religious leaders have sought to provide perspective and clarity on death and the afterlife.

Christianity and Death

Christianity does not avoid the topic of death. The Bible teaches: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die" (Eccles. 3:1-2). Death is inescapable; no one is exempt. The Bible teaches that

everyone—Christians and non-Christians—will stand before God and give an account of their lives (Rom. 14:12). Hebrews 9:27 teaches that it is “appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

The Bible also teaches that death is directly tied to sin. “You shall surely die” was God’s promise to Adam if the first man disobeyed God’s command (Gen. 2:17). Humanity’s sin is why we experience death (Gen. 3:19, 22-24; Rom. 5:12-21, 6:23). As theologian Mark Coppenger summarizes, “God’s design for his embodied image bearers after the fall is that we must die as a physical consequence of living in a fallen world.”⁷⁵

But death does not have the final word in the biblical worldview. Paul explains the Christian posture towards death in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

Paul uses the image of “falling asleep” to illustrate the Christian view that physical death is not permanent. According to the Bible, physical death (the cessation of physiological functioning) results in a temporary separation of the material (body) and immaterial (soul). The soul continues to exist apart from the body while the body is buried, cremated, or disposed of in some form.⁷⁶

Thus, the Bible teaches that the destruction or decay of our physical bodies is not the final word on our existence but that we live on into eternity. Based on passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:8, Luke 23:43, and Hebrews 12:23, Christians believe that upon death, the souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence.⁷⁷

Christians believe there will be a physical, bodily resurrection at Jesus’ Second Coming when the soul will be reunited with a

resurrected body. This resurrection includes believers, who will be raised to eternal life in God's presence, and unbelievers, who will be raised to eternal condemnation and judgment in hell (Acts 24:15). What will these resurrected bodies be like? According to the Bible, a believer's resurrection body will not be entirely different from their earthly body—they will be perfected versions of the earthly bodies, renewed and redeemed (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

Worth noting is that the doctrine of hell has fallen out of favor in many Christian denominations. However, the Bible clearly teaches the existence of hell in Daniel 12:2-3, Matthew 25:31-46, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, and Revelation 20:10, 14-15. Thus, universalism and other theological systems that deny a literal hell are errant interpretations that contradict the plain meaning of the biblical text and 2,000 years of church teaching. The fact that surveys consistently show that only one to two percent of Americans believe they will personally go to hell after they die is likely, in some measure, due to common misinterpretations of the Bible and errant beliefs that give people false hope.⁷⁸

Ultimately, Christians believe that at the end of the age there will be a final judgment of the world where evil will be vanquished and death abolished (Rev. 20:11-15). All people—believers and unbelievers—will appear before God for judgment. As noted earlier, the basic biblical teaching on death and the afterlife is that the judgment for those who persisted in their sin without ever coming to Jesus in faith and repentance will be eternal damnation and hell. Conversely, those who repented of their sin and put their faith in Jesus will be judged according to His imputed righteousness, resulting in forgiveness and eternal life in God's presence.⁷⁹

Islam and Death

Islam teaches that physical death is not the end of human existence. According to Islamic theology, after death, there is an intermediate state that lasts until an end-times resurrection.



During the intermediate state, Muslims believe in a temporary disembodied existence. Souls bound for hell (because of disbelief in Allah or not enough good works) will experience some suffering. In contrast, souls bound for Paradise (because of good works and obedience) will experience complete peace.⁸⁰ On the Day of Judgment (*Yawm al-Din*), everyone will be raised from the dead, and Allah will evaluate each person's deeds and determine the destination of every soul to Paradise (*Jannah*) or Hell (*Jahannam*). Whether one goes to Paradise is dependent on Allah's willingness to grant mercy (Quran 3:115).

An intriguing aspect of Islamic eschatology concerns the Quran's teaching that some people will bear the "burdens" or sins of others they have misled about the truthfulness of Islam and the Quran on Judgment Day (Quran 16:22-25). One highly authentic *hadith* (an early account of Muhammad's sayings and deeds) reports that Muhammad taught that Jews and Christians would bear the sins of Muslims on the Day of Judgement.⁸¹

Islam teaches that admittance into Paradise requires that one does not falsely associate someone with Allah (Quran 4:36). Ascribing divinity to someone or something besides Allah is the sin of *shirk* (idolatry or polytheism). Shirk is considered an unforgivable sin and results in damnation to hell. Christians are considered guilty of shirk for their belief in the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus.⁸²

Finally, although Muslim scholars debate whether jihad (*i.e.*, war waged in the name of Allah) should be interpreted inwardly or outwardly, the Quran discusses it, and history includes many examples of violent attacks carried out in its name.⁸³

According to the thinking of many Islamic scholars, martyrs go immediately to Paradise, a place of everlasting bliss where one receives unimaginable pleasures from Allah.⁸⁴

In sum, Muslims believe that hell is a place of eternal torture for those who do not submit to Allah (Quran 2:39). However, even if a Muslim is faithful to Allah and abides by the Five Pillars, they will not know their final eternal destination until the Day of Judgment. Muhammad himself did not know his eternal destiny, saying to his followers, “I know not what shall be done with me or with you” (Quran 46:8-9).⁸⁵

Pantheism and Death

Pantheists accept death as a natural part of life. Therefore, death should not be feared nor should the prospect of dying prevent people from living meaningful lives. Along with its denial of heaven, hell, or any other eternal realm, pantheism’s rejection of individual human immortality sets it apart from many religions.⁸⁶ Within pantheism, there are two main views on what happens to a person after death.

First, physicalist pantheists, guided by their belief that the universe consists of one fundamental substance (matter), teach that death marks the end of an individual’s life and a return of one’s elements to nature. In this view, there is no immaterial soul or spirit that survives the body’s death. For physicalist pantheists, death is final and marks the conclusion of one’s personal journey.

Although there is no personal immortality according to a physicalist perspective, the return of one’s body to nature represents a type of non-personal immortality. Paul Harrison explains, “The return to nature of our bodies, and the survival of our works and memories in other’s minds, add up to a kind of survival which would satisfy most people.”⁸⁷ Physicalist pantheists do not believe that individuals disappear without a trace at death. Rather, as Harrison explains, “We survive in ways that everyone is familiar with...our genes...live on through our

children and close relatives. We live on through the traces of our actions, the things we have created, and through the memories we leave in those who knew us.”⁸⁸ Pantheists who hold this view are also comforted that their bodies will be reunited with nature at death and make efforts to ensure their cremation or burial does not damage the environment (minimal coffins, woodland burials, etc.).⁸⁹

Second, dualist pantheists, who believe in reincarnation, see death as the end of one life and the beginning of the next. However, unlike Christianity and Islam, dualist pantheism does not hold to a spiritual realm like heaven or hell. Rather, the context for an individual’s afterlife is this world. This view bears some similarities to Hinduism and Buddhism, which also believe in reincarnation. But there is an important difference. In Buddhism, the goal of life is to attain *nirvana*, which entails escape from suffering and the continual cycles of rebirth.⁹⁰ Likewise, in Hinduism, achieving *moksha* (i.e., release from the cycle of death and rebirth) is the aim.⁹¹ In other words, Buddhism and Hinduism view escaping this world and reuniting with the universe as the highest goal. Although dualist pantheists also believe that the context for reincarnation is the present world, they do not aim to escape the world. In fact, they welcome the opportunity to return to this world in another form. (Some hope to return in a higher form while also seeking to avoid reappearance in a lower form, the consequences of bad behavior).

In sum, pantheism does not view death as the punishment for sin or the consequence of poor choices. For pantheists, death is morally indifferent, and people are encouraged not to fear it.



As Paul Harrison notes, “Death is not something we should fear. When we are alive, we are not dead. When we are dead, we are aware of nothing. So, it’s only because of the brief transition between life and death that death poses a problem. We should not live our whole lives in the shadow of such a brief moment.”⁹² In other words, pantheists are committed to making the most of the present life, and that includes not living in fear of death or an afterlife where people are punished for sin, bad choices, or karma.

Naturalism and Death

A naturalistic worldview sees physical death as the end of existence. In his book, *Examined Life*, Harvard philosopher Robert Nozick (1938-2002) reflects on a variety of views about the afterlife. After ruminating on what “nonextinction” might be like, Nozick writes, “It might be nice to believe such a theory, but isn’t the truth starker? This life is the only existence there is; afterward there is nothing.”⁹³ This sentiment represents a naturalist view of death. While Nozick himself holds out a small chance that humanity is not wholly finite, a thoroughly naturalist view sees death as final.

Central to naturalism’s view on death is its commitment to materialism. Because there is no immaterial or spiritual aspect to a person, death is the permanent extinction of a being. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) expressed this perspective on death. In a letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus explained, “Become accustomed to the belief that death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable... because it takes away the craving for immortality.” According to Epicurus, people wrongly fear death because they believe they will experience pain or suffering beyond the grave. But, if there is no awareness in death, as naturalism maintains, fear of death is unwarranted because none

of us will consciously experience it. As Epicurus summarizes, “So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist.”⁹⁴

According to naturalism, the material world is all that exists (there are no spirits, gods, afterlife, or souls), and personal extinction awaits everyone at death. The belief in personal extinction at death leads to a variety of lifestyles. One option, egoistic hedonism, pursues the gratification of desire and embraces common mantras like “seize the day,” “live it up,” and “you only live once.” (Although he’s often credited with “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” Epicurus urged moderation since hangovers and other ills could cancel out or overwhelm whatever pleasures one might have chosen in a headlong race toward self-gratification. Nevertheless, Epicurus still advocated a life of maximum net pleasure.)



We should hasten to say that not all naturalists orient their lives around the pursuit of pleasure. Others adopt a more altruistic mindset, devoting their lives to improving the world through humanitarian efforts and education. The brevity of life and the finality of death motivate many naturalists to invest in future generations, the environment, and the happiness of their friends and family.



Postmodernism and Death

Postmodernism claims no overriding explanation or purpose for death. Additionally, there is no afterlife or possibility of reincarnation within postmodernism. Death is a brute fact of life. Thus, a postmodern approach to death is marked by a mixture of fear, ambivalence, and resignation.

However, postmodern thinkers argue that people do not need to fear death. Along these lines, philosopher Simon Critchley argues that coming to grips with the reality of death (and pending extinction) can help people live meaningful lives. On this point, Critchley writes, “The main task of philosophy... is to prepare us for death, to provide a kind of training for death, the cultivation of an attitude towards our finitude that faces—and faces down—the terror of annihilation without offering promises of an afterlife.”⁹⁵ In a material universe there is no heaven or hell, and annihilation is humanity’s fate. Accepting this reality can and should allay fear about the future and motivate productive and purposeful living.

With its rejection of metanarratives, denial of an afterlife, and insistence on a material universe, postmodernism's view of death informs its approach to life and meaning. As Critchley explains elsewhere, “[O]nce we’ve accepted that the meaning of life is ours to make, we make meaning. Then we accept that we live in a situation, or rather, that we inherit a situation of meaninglessness, and out of that meaninglessness we create meaning in relationship to the ordinariness of our common existence.”⁹⁶

In the end, postmodernism's approach to death resembles the naturalist perspective (there is no afterlife and death is final). Moreover, because postmodernism rejects metanarratives, as in its approach to life, there is no overriding purpose in death. In short, while postmodernism offers no hope of heaven, it provides what its adherents believe is a realistic view of life and death. According to postmodernists, acceptance of this view is a pragmatic and helpful step toward pursuing a fulfilling and meaningful life.

SYNCRETISM: AMERICA'S MOST DOMINANT WORLDVIEW

Today, few people hold a consistent belief system that fits neatly into one of the five aforementioned worldviews. In fact, research by George Barna shows that most American adults lack a cohesive worldview. According to Barna's research, the dominant worldview in America is now syncretism, a patchwork of conflicting and often irreconcilable beliefs and values. In 2021, 88 percent of American adults held a syncretistic worldview.⁹⁷

Many people today take a “smorgasbord” or cafeteria approach to developing their worldview; they pick and choose aspects of various worldviews they like and combine them into one guiding system. A syncretistic worldview develops when a person is unsatisfied with how one worldview answers a fundamental question and plugs in ideas or values from other worldviews to satisfy their desires or intellectual concerns. This approach may not be the result of conscious decisions—in fact, it often is not.

**MANY PEOPLE TAKE A “SMORGASBORD” OR CAFETERIA
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For example, many Christians find karma—the concept of spiritual cause and effect that is central to both Hinduism and Buddhism—appealing, despite their professed belief that Christ’s salvific work overcomes their “bad” or sinful actions and the resulting consequences. Even though less than one percent of Americans hold Eastern Mysticism as their worldview, 57 percent believe in karma, including 33 percent of those who otherwise possess a biblical worldview.⁹⁸

Another example of syncretism is found in how many professing Christians view human nature. Despite the Bible’s clear teaching on sin, humanity’s fallenness, and the need for repentance, 52 percent of those who score high enough on George Barna’s American Worldview Inventory to be considered as having a biblical worldview nevertheless believe that people are “essentially good.”⁹⁹

Why is syncretism so prevalent? Although there are several possible explanations, one reason is that many people have never thought seriously about their guiding beliefs. Most people go through life and unassumingly adopt their culture’s dominant values. A second reason people (including many professing Christians) hold contradictory beliefs is a desire for control. Commenting on the prevalence of unbiblical beliefs in the culture, Barna notes, “Whether we are taking charge of our destiny, our spirituality, boundaries dictated by truth, moral behaviors, or wealth management strategies, Americans are largely driven by a need to have control of every aspect of their lives.”¹⁰⁰ Whereas a consistent worldview often makes uncomfortable demands on our behavior, a syncretistic approach to worldview allows people to pick the values and beliefs that suit their perceived needs, emotions, and desires.

Another reason for the prevalence of syncretism is that many people sense aspects of truth in a variety of worldviews, and they want to bring these truths together. Islam, naturalism, pantheism, and postmodernism all share beliefs with the Bible. For example,

Islam teaches that there is a higher being who is worthy of worship and obedience. Naturalism and pantheism value the created world (although they don't recognize it as created). Postmodernism argues that people are significantly affected by their circumstances and environments.

From a Christian understanding, the fact that these worldviews contain kernels of truth is a result of common grace. Because of common grace, which includes the favors and blessings apart from salvation that God gives mankind, non-Christians can use reason to discover, discern, and describe true facts and realities about the world (Rom. 1:18-32). These true or partially true beliefs, in turn, can have positive outcomes for a society that embraces them—such as protecting human rights, caring for creation, or being faithful to one's family. For Christians, the incorporation of tenets of the biblical worldview in other religions and worldviews—despite increasing secularization and growing hostility toward Christianity in many parts of the world—has missiological and evangelistic implications as it points to humanity's insatiable quest for truth and desire to make sense of the world.



The dominance of syncretism in America makes it even more vital for Christians to be equipped with a robust, well-informed understanding of their own worldview as well as competing worldviews. Christians need to know how to reclaim good and true ideas that are tangled up in a hybrid worldview, properly attributing those ideas to God's Word and refuting unbiblical ideas that are mixed in with them. This was the approach employed by Paul in Acts 17 when he debated the Athenian philosophers. Instead of rejecting their worldview wholesale, he concentrated on an aspect of their worship (an altar to an unknown god) to share the gospel. Paul was also aware of the Athenians' poems and philosophy, and he strategically used this knowledge in his evangelism. Similarly, Christians can use true or partially true beliefs found in other worldviews as a means of sharing the gospel.

FOUR LINES OF EVIDENCE COMMENDING THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

With so many worldviews competing for our allegiance today, it is worth taking time to consider some of the evidence commending the biblical worldview. Like other worldviews, Christianity claims to present an accurate account of the world. But how do Christianity's claims hold up?

Although Christian apologists have offered a myriad of reasons for the truthfulness of the biblical worldview, since space is limited, we will concentrate on four basic lines of evidence: the Bible itself, archeology, morality, and science.

The Bible Itself

What the Bible Says about Itself

An investigation into the truthfulness of Christianity should begin by considering what the Bible says about itself. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by

THE INTERNAL CONSISTENCY OF THE BIBLE IS WHAT WE WOULD EXPECT IF THE BIBLE IS WHAT IT CLAIMS TO BE—GOD’S TRUE REVELATION.

God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” In other words, the Bible claims to be true. Of course, the mere assertion of truth is not self-proving. However, the Bible claims it is inspired by God and says its assertions are true (2 Peter 3:16). As Jason Lisle notes, “Such statements do prove *at least* that the writers of the Bible considered it to be not merely their own opinion, but in fact the inerrant Word of God.”¹⁰¹ Additional evidence in the Bible itself, including its remarkable consistency and coherence, the fulfillment of hundreds of specific prophecies, and what one author has called “undesigned coincidences,” strengthen its internal claims of truthfulness.¹⁰²

Consistency

The Bible’s uniqueness and internal consistency have long been noted by apologists. Unlike other sacred books, like the Quran or the Hindu Vedas, the Bible is remarkably self-consistent, despite having been written by more than 40 authors over a span of 2,000 years. The themes of man’s sin, God’s love and forgiveness, and God’s plan of salvation are consistent throughout the pages of Scripture. The internal consistency of the Bible is what we would expect if the Bible is what it claims to be—God’s true revelation.

Additionally, the manuscript evidence for the Bible is astounding. For example, there are around 643 extant manuscripts of Homer’s *Iliad*; the oldest dates to 500 years after Homer died. However, for the New Testament, there are over 5,600 extant manuscripts all written within 100 years of the first century.¹⁰³ This indicates that the Bible has been accurately transmitted

through the centuries. Few people would doubt that Homer wrote the *Iliad*, yet the Bible is far more authenticated.

Fulfilled Prophecy

Another compelling aspect of the Bible's self-attestation to its own truthfulness is fulfilled prophecy. In fact, God Himself offers fulfilled prophecy as a proof of His existence and utter uniqueness: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done" (Is. 46:9b-10a).

Two examples of fulfilled prophecy include Isaiah 53/Psalm 22 and Matthew 24:1-2. In Isaiah 53, the author describes the crucifixion of Jesus in extraordinary detail. Not only does Isaiah describe Jesus' suffering with incredible accuracy, but he also prophetically explains its purpose: "yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors" (Is. 53:12b). Psalm 22, written by David in about 1000 B.C., also describes in graphic detail the horrors of death by crucifixion—centuries before crucifixion was invented. Incredibly, Jesus quotes Psalm 22 while on the cross (Mat. 27:46). Other Old Testament passages that point to Jesus' death include Psalm 2:2, 16:10, 68:18, and 69:4, and Zechariah 12:10 and 13:7.

In Matthew 24:1-2, Jesus accurately predicts the destruction of the temple, explaining to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." About 35 years later, this prophecy was fulfilled when the Romans, led by the Roman emperor Titus, successfully besieged Jerusalem, leveling the city and the Second Temple.¹⁰⁴

Archeological Evidence

The historical record supports Christianity's truth claims. Specifically, the recent work of archeologists has verified many of the historical details of the biblical record. For example, in 2015, archeologists announced the discovery of clay bullae in the City

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of David. One bulla included a royal seal stating, “Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) Ahaz, king of Judah.” Along with the Siloan inscription (discovered in 1880), the bulla corroborates the Bible’s accounting of Hezekiah as a historical king of Judah. Significantly, bullae have also been discovered with the names of other Hebrew officials, including Gedaliah and Jucal, whose names appear in Jeremiah 38:1.¹⁰⁵

Archeology has verified other historical details in the Bible. In 1961, a stone that mentioned Pontius Pilate was discovered in Caesarea Maritima. Archeologists agree that the stone confirms that Pilate was the Prefect of Judea at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion.¹⁰⁶ The Tel Dan inscription, discovered in 1993, provided the first historical evidence of King David.¹⁰⁷ In 1847, excavations in northern Iraq confirmed the reference to “Sargon of Assyria” in Isaiah 20:1. Prior to 1847, there was no known mention of Sargon outside the Bible.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, archeological discoveries have confirmed King Jehoiachin’s presence in Babylon, Sanballat as governor of Samaria, King Belshazzar as a Babylonian ruler, and many others.¹⁰⁹

Most famously, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 provided hundreds of manuscripts including at least portions of every book in the Old Testament except for Esther. For context, the oldest known complete manuscript of the Hebrew Old Testament is the Leningrad Codex (produced in 1008 A.D.). Many of the Dead Sea Scrolls predate this manuscript by 1,200 years. Subsequent study of these scrolls and comparison of them to later documents revealed that the Hebrew Bible had been preserved with remarkable accuracy.¹¹⁰ This archeological discovery underscored the trustworthiness of the Bible and God’s providential preserving of His Word.

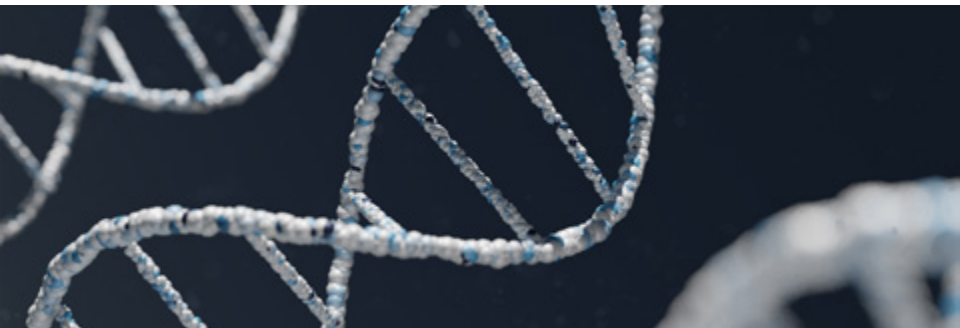
Moral Evidence

If objective moral values exist, where did they come from? As we've seen in our overview of naturalism and postmodernism, many worldviews believe morality is the product of evolution, culture, or personal choice. Morality in these worldviews is subjective and dependent on impersonal, valueless processes that are determined over time. Christianity, however, argues that humanity's basic intuition about morality (*i.e.*, that it is objective and discernible) is correct and, furthermore, rooted in God's very character.¹¹¹

The moral instinct that torturing babies for fun is immoral is shared by most people. Why is this? The reason, contrary to moral relativism, is that human beings, made in God's image, have a conscience that testifies to the moral norms and order of the world. In other words, the existence of very similar moral norms and the prevailing desire for justice present in every society is evidence that a moral lawgiver has implanted a sense of right and wrong in every human being. As Paul Copan explains, "A personal, self-aware, purposeful, good God provides the natural and necessary context for the existence of valuable, rights-bearing, morally-responsible human persons."¹¹² While more could be said, this is the basic moral argument for Christianity.

Scientific Evidence

There are significant arguments from science that support the claims of Christianity. The Bible teaches that God's active work at creation, not random chance, accounts for the universe's existence. Scientific discoveries over the past several decades have strengthened belief in a Creator.



THE EXISTENCE OF SIMILAR MORAL NORMS AND THE PREVAILING DESIRE FOR JUSTICE IS EVIDENCE THAT A MORAL LAWGIVER HAS IMPLANTED A SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG IN EVERY HUMAN BEING.

The Fine-Tuning of the Universe

The fine-tuning of the universe is seen in the precise values of the gravitational constant, electromagnetic force versus the force of gravity, mass density of the universe, expansion rate of the universe, and initial entropy.¹¹³ Additionally, consider the necessary conditions for the earth to be habitable that are met. For example, the earth is the perfect distance from the sun, protected from harmful solar radiation by its magnetic field, kept warm by an insulating atmosphere, and has the right chemical ingredients for life, including water and carbon.¹¹⁴ Scientific insights like these reveal a stunning level of complexity in the natural world that theories such as evolution cannot account for.

The Complexity of DNA

Christian scientists also point to the science of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) as another proof of God's creative work. As Walter Bradley explains, "That such a remarkable information storage system exists, and that the DNA molecules have somehow come to be encoded with the precise information needed for life, is the climax to an amazing testimony from science of God's providential care for us in His creation."¹¹⁵ In other words, rather than discredit the biblical account of creation, the discovery of genes, proteins, DNA, and other advances in microbiology support God's power and creativity in creation as revealed in the Bible.



CURRENT STATE OF WORLDVIEW IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE CHURCH

A biblical worldview has long been thought to be the predominant worldview in America. However, recent surveys show that the percentage of Americans who possess a biblical worldview is in a state of decline. According to researcher George Barna, as few as six percent of Americans held a biblical worldview in 2020—half the number it was just 25 years prior.¹¹⁶ An additional national study conducted by Barna in 2023 revealed the number had fallen even further in the intervening two years, with only four percent of Americans qualifying as having a biblical worldview.¹¹⁷

Christianity's declining moral influence on Western society and the simultaneous rise in popularity of other worldviews make these low numbers not altogether shocking. Perhaps the most eye-opening detail of Barna's research is that the decline in the number of Americans who hold a biblical worldview has not been limited to the unchurched. Incredibly, a 2022 study revealed that only 37 percent of American pastors have a biblical worldview,¹¹⁸ and a 2021 study showed that only 21 percent of those who regularly attend evangelical churches have a biblical worldview. Compare these low numbers to the 81 percent of evangelical churchgoers who claim to hold a biblical worldview, and it is evident that considerable confusion exists among professing Christians about what constitutes a biblical worldview.¹¹⁹

Significantly, it is not just theological nuances that are being questioned or debated in the church; many within the church are rejecting core tenets of Christianity. For example, among those who attend evangelical churches, 52 percent believe there is no absolute moral truth, 43 percent believe Jesus Christ sinned while on earth, and 42 percent reject the Bible as the primary source of authority. Moreover, 61 percent do not read the Bible daily.¹²⁰

Given this inconsistent relationship with the Bible, it is not surprising that the church's historical teachings regarding abortion and marriage are also falling out of favor among self-described evangelicals. Of those who attend an evangelical church, 44 percent claim that the Bible is ambiguous on the abortion issue, and 34 percent reject the definition of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.¹²¹

Again, it is one thing for individual Christians to be confused and even disagree about the finer points of theology. But the fact that a near-majority of American evangelical churchgoers reject the authority of the Bible and basic Christian teachings about God, humanity, and morality ought to be deeply concerning to those who care about the health of the church.

**PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS NEED TO KNOW
THAT THE BIBLE PROVIDES THOROUGH, COHESIVE, AND
SATISFYING ANSWERS TO LIFE'S BIGGEST QUESTIONS.**

BUILDING A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

The decline in biblical worldview has been the sharpest among the youngest American adults, with only two percent of those aged 18-29 holding to a biblical worldview.¹²² However, Barna's research offers a potential path forward for reversing these trends and building a strong biblical worldview.

Worldviews Are Formed Early

Through decades of worldview research, George Barna has found that a person's worldview is primarily formed between 15 months and 13 years of age. Although it will be refined throughout the teenage years and into the early twenties, one's worldview remains relatively stable and consistent after age 13.¹²³ This means that if churches, Christian parents, Christian schools, and ministries want to instill a biblical worldview in the next generation, starting early will be crucial.

Who Can Help Build a Biblical Worldview?

Parents

If future generations are going to be taught a biblical worldview, Christian parents must begin to see themselves as the primary disciple-makers in their home (Deut. 6:6-9).

Although instruction at church, youth group, Christian school, and home-schooling cooperatives can complement and support a parent's work, institutions can never replace the discipleship that should take place at home. Since one's worldview emerges in the preteen years, parents must take the lead in imparting biblical truth to their children. Of course, this will require parents to reevaluate their own fundamental viewpoints to make sure their beliefs and behaviors align with biblical principles.



INSTITUTIONS CAN NEVER REPLACE THE DISCIPLESHIP THAT SHOULD TAKE PLACE AT HOME.

Barna's research shows that besides parents, the next most significant worldview-shaping influences in a person's life are media messages, public policy, schooling, and peer pressure.¹²⁴ Thus, effective efforts at instilling biblical principles in children must consider, respond to, and, at times, strategically counteract messages purveyed by these influences. Of these influences, schooling is especially important since children will spend a cumulative 16,000 hours in classrooms during their K-12 years. Ensuring that classroom instruction does not undermine parents' discipleship efforts is imperative.

Pastors/Ministry Leaders

Pastors also have a role to play in developing the worldview of their people. As noted earlier, research has shown that only 21 percent of those who attend evangelical churches have a biblical worldview.¹²⁵ Moreover, a 2022 study revealed that only 51 percent of evangelical pastors have a biblical worldview themselves.¹²⁶ Unfortunately, statistics like these show that seminaries, Bible colleges, and many of the church's discipleship efforts have failed, and those in leadership must be willing to acknowledge these shortcomings and reevaluate their approaches to ministry and pastoral training.

Churches

Churches must prioritize worldview formation. Expository preaching (*i.e.*, preaching that focuses on the meaning of the biblical passage and applies it to the congregation), reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible, and an emphasis on spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, evangelism, and fasting can help church members form and develop a biblical worldview.



Churches must see discipleship as an urgent need and design their programs and activities to foster mentoring relationships where biblical principles can be studied and taught within the congregation (see Titus 2:1-8). Time is too short, and the spiritual needs of God's people are too acute not to spend significant time addressing the root cause of why so many people—including those in church—hold beliefs and adopt patterns of living that do not comport with a biblical worldview.

Although every church activity does not necessarily need to be geared toward worldview formation, church leaders should be willing to reevaluate current approaches to ministry to ensure that everything on the church calendar is working together to accomplish the overarching goal of discipleship.

Emergent Followers

Another insight from Barna's research is the identification of Emergent Followers, a group of people more inclined than the rest of the adult population to develop a biblical worldview. While Integrated Disciples are those who have integrated their faith into every dimension of their life and possess a fully formed biblical worldview, Emergent Followers are those who accept a mixture of biblical and non-biblical ideas. For example, 76 percent of Emergent Followers have a predominantly biblical understanding of sin and salvation, but only 27 percent have a biblical understanding of God, creation, and history. Thus, in terms of developing their worldview, areas of weakness

among Emergent Followers should be targeted in discipleship programs and resource development. Because Emergent Followers possess some tenets of a biblical worldview and are more receptive to biblically grounded instruction, focusing on this group (which represents a fifth of the American adult population) provides a promising opportunity to make inroads into America's biblical worldview deficit.¹²⁷

A Call to Act with Conviction

In an age that is increasingly hostile to the basic teachings of Christianity, Christian leaders and parents must recommit themselves to teaching a worldview grounded in the Bible and be willing to reevaluate their approach to discipleship. The stakes are high—present and future generations need to know that the Bible provides thorough, cohesive, and satisfying answers to life's biggest questions and challenges.

**FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES SUBMITTING TO
AND OBEYING EVERYTHING THE BIBLE TEACHES
AND ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH HIS WORD.**

Reversing the decline in biblical worldview will require faithful Christians to elevate worldview development and formation as one of their highest priorities. Churches, parents, para-church organizations, and Christian schools (K-12 and Christian colleges and universities) must work together to develop effective discipleship resources. As mentioned, schooling plays an especially important role in worldview development, and Christians need to engage in the education system at all levels, including curriculum development and school board elections. Moreover, Christians serving in media, entertainment, and the arts need to strategically leverage their influence, resources, and

time to create programs and shows that promote rather than denigrate biblical principles and values.

The Bible does not mince words when it describes “lukewarm” Christians or those who hear God’s Word but forget and do not obey what they supposedly learned (Rev. 3:1-16, James 1:22). It is not enough to mentally subscribe to the tenets of a biblical worldview; following Jesus requires submitting to and obeying everything the Bible teaches and aligning our lives with His Word.

If Christians were to fully live out their worldview, their lives would be a powerful and persuasive force in a dysfunctional, muddled world. Francis Schaeffer once wrote, “The central problem of our age is not liberalism or modernism... [it is] tending to do the Lord’s work in the power of the flesh rather than of the Spirit.”¹²⁸ It is easy to compartmentalize our religious and secular life, reading the Bible at church but reverting to the playbook of the world for the other parts of our life. But our fundamental beliefs about God cannot be detached from the real world. And as we’ve seen, the questions that Christianity illuminates and answers are far too important and comprehensive to be sequestered.

By knowing God, Christians can see the world and its inhabitants as they truly are and change the world from the inside out.¹²⁹ We know the source of evil in the world and ourselves, and we know the solution to the problem of evil. We can have compassion and understanding for the human condition because the Bible teaches both humanity’s intrinsic value and comprehensive corruption. And we can act with conviction on issues of moral value, even when there is a high cost, because we have everything we need for this life and beyond.



CORNERSTONES OF A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

As previously noted, research regrettably shows that very few people have a biblical worldview. However, 2023 research by George Barna offers hope. Although space does not permit a full discussion of Barna's findings, it is worth summarizing his latest report.

Decades of research demonstrate that few people—including professing Christians—have a consistent worldview. In fact, most people have some elements of inconsistent thinking blended into their worldview. But new research shows that a strong theological foundation can significantly contribute to worldview clarity. Encouragingly, commitment to just a few basic theological tenets can lead to a stable worldview. Of course, for these principles to qualify as personal foundations for one's life, it requires, in Barna's words, "both an understanding of the principles and a passionate, thoughtful ownership of those beliefs in order to be translated into personal behavior that is consistent with those principles."¹³⁰ Thus, while the cornerstones Barna has identified are described in terms of belief, each belief entails behavior consistent with these beliefs.

What beliefs are necessary to have a strong foundation for a biblical worldview? According to Barna, the seven cornerstones of a biblical worldview are:

1. An orthodox, biblical understanding of God.
2. All human beings are sinful by nature; every choice we make has moral considerations and consequences.
3. The consequences of our sin can only be forgiven and eliminated through Jesus Christ. That forgiveness is available only through our personal, sincere acknowledgment and confession of our sins and complete reliance on His grace to forgive those sins.
4. The entire Bible is true, reliable, and relevant, making it the best moral guide for every person in all situations.
5. Absolute moral truth exists—and those truths are defined by God, described in the Bible, and are unchanging across time and cultures.

6. The ultimate purpose of human life is to know, love, and serve God with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul.
7. Success on earth is best understood as consistent obedience to God—in thoughts, words, and actions.

Although these principles do not say everything that needs to be said about the Christian faith, they represent a faithful summary of the most crucial doctrines. In short, the seven cornerstones include the major doctrines of Scripture, God, man, sin, Christ, and salvation. While right belief does not automatically lead to right behavior, right behavior rarely, if ever, occurs without a prior appreciation and commitment to right doctrine.

RIGHT BEHAVIOR RARELY OCCURS WITHOUT A PRIOR APPRECIATION AND COMMITMENT TO RIGHT DOCTRINE.

Research shows that more than four out of five adults who embrace these seven basic teachings possess a biblical worldview. Thus, teaching these cornerstones and modeling their associated behavior is an excellent place to begin with our discipleship and worldview formation efforts.

CONCLUSION

A truly biblical worldview is rooted in and shaped by the truth that God has revealed to humanity through His Word. The importance of knowing and building one's life on truth is one of the Bible's most repeated refrains. Jesus spoke about this in the Sermon on the Mount when He said:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had

been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Mat. 7:24-27).

The moral of the story: if a person's worldview is inconsistent with the Bible, or if biblical truth is inconsistently applied in one's life, that person is in danger of falling like the house built on the sand. We can avoid this fate by building our metaphorical house on the rock. This means knowing God's Word, applying it to our daily lives, and having "the mind of Christ" in everything we think, say, and do (1 Cor. 2:6-16; Rom. 8:5-6, 12:2).



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Special thanks to Laura Grossberndt for editorial assistance.

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The American Worldview Inventory is an annual survey conducted by Dr. George Barna and the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. The survey includes 54 worldview-related questions divided into eight categories concerning belief and behavior. Respondents must score 80 percent or higher on the survey in order to qualify as having a “biblical worldview.” For more information, visit <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/category/crc/awvi/>.

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