

Understanding the Ideas that Shape Our World Part 1

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

B. What We Are Doing

1. Tonight we begin an *aggressive* pursuit of implementing this.
2. To make sure we aren't conforming to the world, we need to learn *how* to diagnose exactly what the *world is* & how it seeks to squeeze us into its mold.
3. Then we need to learn how to extricate ourselves from the world's insidious grip & embrace a thoroughly renewed mind.
4. To that end, we're devoting Saturday nights to --
Building a Christian Worldview
5. The place for us to begin is by understanding just what a worldview *is*.
6. Let me explain by way of a story . . .

II. Worldview

A. Terra

1. NASA sends out a sophisticated new space exploration probe.
2. This probe is going to map sections of the sky never explored before.
3. 5 days into its mission it sends back data that stuns the technicians.
4. They discover there's a planet exactly like Earth orbiting the Sun on the same orbital course, but previously unseen because it lies *exactly* on the opposite side of the Sun.
5. This discovery is so monumental, the probe's old assignment is scraped and it's re-tasked to fly to the planet for closer observation.
6. Pictures of the planet's surface show abundant evidence of intelligent life;
 - a. There are roads, cities, dams, & other features indicating an advanced civilization.
 - b. The probe also picks up radio & TV waves which it sends back to Earth.
 - c. Analysis of these signals reveals that the creatures living on that planet are in nearly every respect just like humans.
 - d. Many hours of the signals are recorded until the scientists at NASA are able to interpret the language & know what the people are saying.
 - e. It's discovered they refer to their world as "Terra."
7. After 2 years of observing life on this other world, NASA decides to send a manned space flight.
8. *You're* picked to be Earth's ambassador & are taught their language.
9. Your assignment is to learn as much about the Terrans as you can.
10. The journey takes a month but passes quickly because of your excitement.
11. When you arrive, you're greeted warmly.
 - a. After the initial *formal* ceremonies welcoming you to their world, things quiet down & return to normal --
 - b. And the real work of your assignment begins; by interviewing the Terrans to learn as much as you can.

B. The Terran Culture "Onion"

BEHAVIOR

1. The first thing you do in your research is to simply *observe* Terrans going about their daily lives.

- a. You sit in a public place & just watch & listen.
 - b. You read their newspapers, listen to the radio, & watch TV.
2. What you observe is the realm of Terran **BEHAVIOR**.
3. Behavior is the what people **DO**;
- a. It's their actions & reactions,
 - b. Their speech, what they say, or don't say as the case may be.
3. The point is, behavior is the most obvious thing about people because it's what we *observe*.

VALUES

4. After watching the Terrans for a few days, you notice that, unlike Earth, people all behave on Terra *the same way*.
5. Given the same set of circumstances, all Terrans do & say *exactly* the same thing.
6. It gets to the point where you're able to predict with great accuracy what a Terran will do at any given moment.
7. This makes you curious, so you interview them & ask *WHY* they chose to do what they do, *WHY* they behave that way.
8. They respond by saying they did what they did because it was *BEST*.
9. You have just discovered their **VALUES**
10. Values are the unseen basis of behavior.
- a. A person does or says something because in the crucial moment of their choosing, that seemed *best*.
 - b. That behavior was given *greater value* than the other options that presented themselves.
11. Let me use an example. You're driving down the street trying to decide where to stop for lunch.
- a. On one side of the street are Fast Food joints. The other side of the street is all sit down restaurants.
 - b. You turn into the Fast Food Mall – **Behavior**.
 - c. But *why?* Two considerations drive you; time & money.
 - 1) You know you'd get a better quality meal at a sit down restaurant across the street,
 - 2) But you need to get back to work & don't have enough money budgeted for a regular restaurant today.
 - d. Your choice of fast food was driven at that moment by the higher **Value** you place on time & money than a quality meal.

BELIEFS

12. As you quiz the Terrans on the *why* behind their uniform behavior, you quickly realize *they all hold the same set of values*.
13. This stirs your curiosity.
14. Your question now is; where do the Terrans *get* their values from?
15. What tells them one choice has greater merit & value than another?
16. At this point, the Terrans become a bit confused because the answer to that seems so obvious to them. They're surprised *you* do not already KNOW it.
17. You don't so you press them. They reply by simply shrugging their shoulders & saying, they *believe* it to be that way; that *what* they chose is *best*.
18. You've now uncovered the realm of **BELIEF**.
19. Belief has to do with the *truths* a person lives by.
20. Back to the fast food illustration.
- a. You pick a fast food joint over a sit-down restaurant because of time & money.
 - b. But what about time & money do you *believe* that made them the priority?
 - c. Simple –
 - 1) You believe it to be true that it is good *not* to get fired from work for being late from

lunch.

2) And you believe it's also true that going into debt for something like lunch is unwise.

21. Let's Recap what we've covered so far.

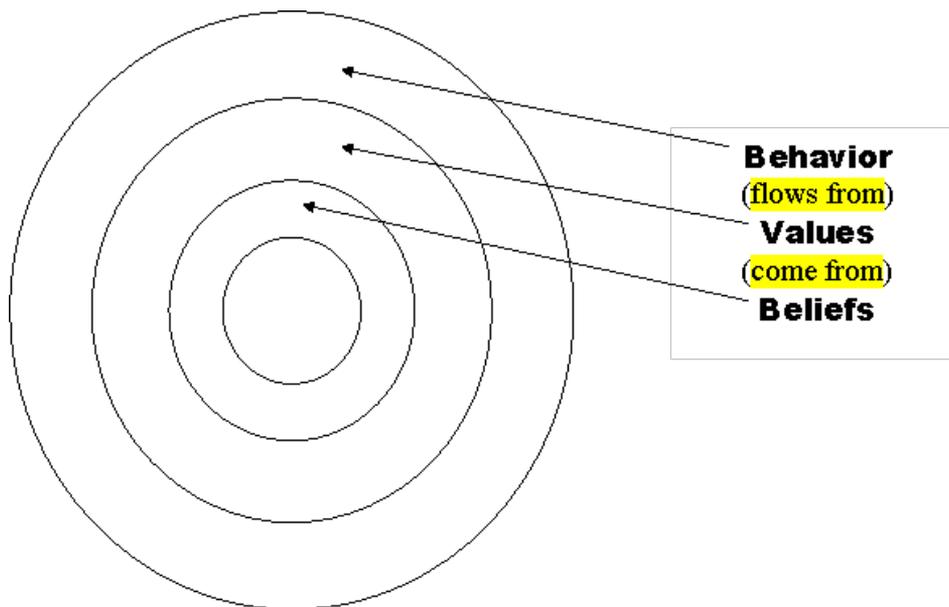
Behavior is what people DO

Values are what people think is BEST

Beliefs are what people consider TRUE

22. And these three give rise to, or rest on, each other – like an *onion*.

23. If we were to diagram this we could present it this way . . .



24. Now, as you type up your report for the folks back home on Earth, something begins to nag at you.

a. your study seems incomplete; something crucial is missing.

b. you feel like you've assembled a puzzle & there's one last missing piece right smack-dab in the center of the picture without which you can't tell what it's a picture of!

c. then it hits you. Of course! There has to be one more layer to that cultural onion you've been peeling by interrogating the Terrans.

25. Their belief in what is *true* must rest on an *even more* foundational sense of simply what **IS**.

26. This is the realm of **REALITY**, & the core, the center of the whole Terran system.

27. **Behavior** flows from *values*, which come from *beliefs*, which rests on what one considers the *Ultimate Reality*.

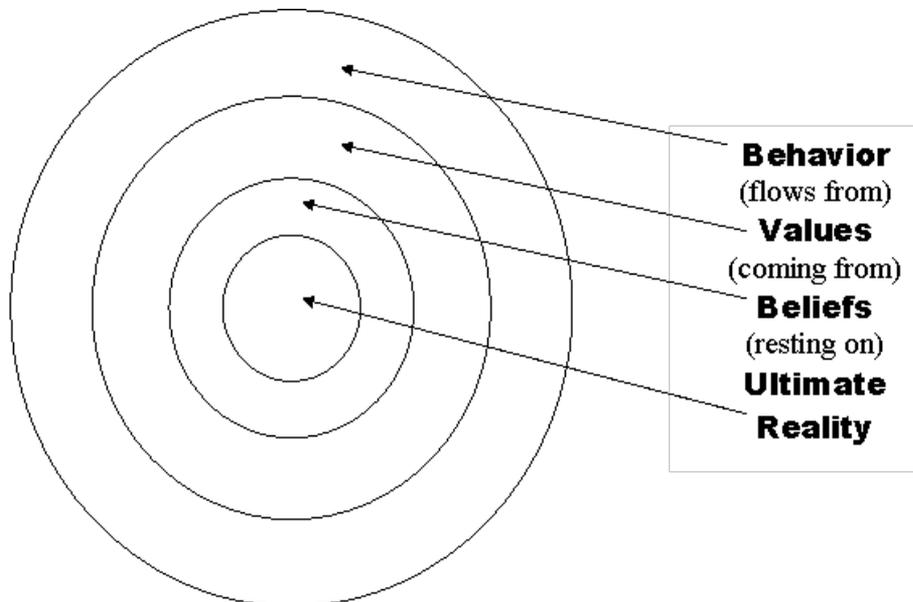
28. This innermost core is a *given*, a person's *starting point*.

29. In philosophy it's called *the fundamental presupposition*.

a. A presupposition is something that doesn't *need* to be proven.

b. It's a self-obvious reality that transcends the need to be verified by any other criteria.

30. This completes our diagram.



31. Looking at this *in reverse* we'd say that . . .
- One's *Ultimate Reality* defines
 - What one believes is *true*,
 - So what is *best*,
 - And this ends with the *behavior* we observe.
32. This entire complex, the *cultural onion*; is what is known as *Worldview*.
- Worldview includes a person's whole sense of reality & how it translates into daily choices.
 - It includes beliefs & values, so the whole issue of morality is a reflection of one's Worldview.
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33. As you question the Terrans, you realize that the reason their behavior is so predictable is because they all hold an identical sense of Ultimate Reality.
34. Satisfied that you've now peeled the Terran "cultural worldview onion" to its core, you finish your report, jump back into your spaceship, & set out for home.

C. Differing Worldviews

- Your trip to Terra has been deeply rewarding and a deep sense of peace comes as you reflect on Terran society.
- Then the prospect of what awaits you back on Earth begins to trouble you.
 - Compared to the Terrans, Humans are totally unpredictable.
 - No one can guess with any kind of certainty what someone will choose.
- This observation gives you an incredible insight.
 - If the Terrans are so uniform & consistent in their behavior *because* they all share a common worldview,
 - Then the reason Humans are so different & unpredictable is because WHAT?
- THEY HAVE DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS.**
- That solution seems obvious & satisfies you only until you realize the *problem* it creates.
 - Since the core of worldview is what one holds as the *???* [Ultimate Reality]
 - That means Human beings must have very different views on what's **REAL**.
 - But reality by its very definition is that which **IS**.
 - Therefore, when there are different views on reality, we have only two options:
 - They are all wrong.
 - One is right, but the others are wrong.

6. As you re-near Earth, you realize a whole new quest, an even **greater** adventure than your trip to Terra is about to begin.
7. That quest is to discover which if any of the Worldviews Humans believe is **right**.

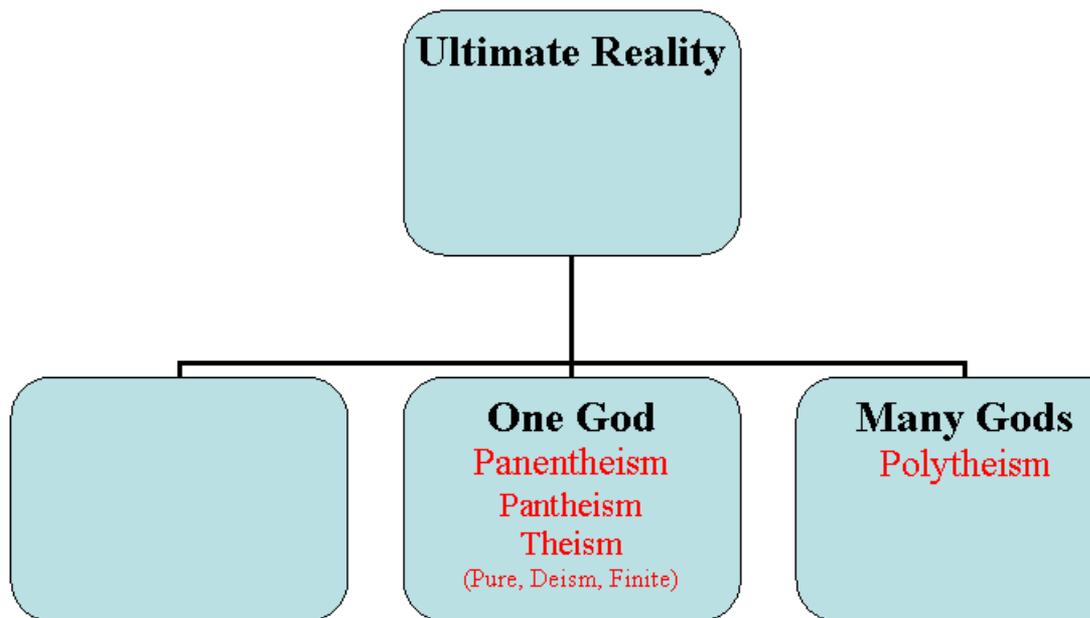
III. THE WORLDVIEWS

A. Interrogating Humans

1. After 10 years of continuous research, reading books & asking thousands of people all over the world the same set of questions you asked the Terrans, you narrow the number of worldviews down to 5 basic ones.
2. You classify them thus, relative to their belief about the universe & God:
 - Theism
 - Atheism
 - Pantheism
 - Panentheism
 - Polytheism
3. You'll notice the root of all these words is 'theos'
 - a. Theos was the Greek word for the ultimate Creator God – the One who was above the deities common to Greek religion & mythology.
 - b. Sticking a prefix onto this root of **theos** gives a one word summary of the worldview . . .
 - 1) Atheism – **no** God
 - 2) Pantheism – **all** God
 - 3) Panentheism – **all in** God
 - 4) Polytheism – **many** gods

4. **Theists** believe in a God who is both in & beyond the universe.
 - a. This God is personal & eternal
 - b. But there are several different branches Theism.
 - 1) **Pure Theists** see God as infinite & beyond the universe but acting in it in a supernatural way. Christianity, Judaism, & Islam are all Pure Theists.
 - 2) **Deists** see God as infinite & the divine Creator, but He is no longer **in** the universe. He set natural laws to govern the creation and never interferes with them. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine were Deists as well as a good number of liberal theologians.
 - 3) **Finite Theists** believe God is both beyond & in the universe but that His power & nature are limited. William James & Rabbi Harold Kushner hold this view.
 ***Last Night on Larry King – A Panel of religious leaders giving their views on if there is a God, why the Tsunami?
5. **Atheists** believe the universe is all there is, ever has been, & ever will be.
 - a. There is no God either beyond or in the universe.
 - b. Some of the more famous atheists were Karl Marx, Madelyn Murray O'Hair, & Jean-Paul Sartre.
6. **Pantheists** see God & the universe as one & the same.
 - a. For the pantheist, there is only one thing, one reality – All is God & God is all.
 - b. Just as the cells of your body are a part of the whole, so every particle of the universes is in fact not a thing to itself, it's just a part of the one thing that is – God.
 - c. Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and the New Age Movement are all Pantheists.
7. **Panentheism** is a tad difficult to understand because it is so contrary to the way most of us think.
 - a. The Panentheist believes that God is **in** the universe but **not beyond** it.
 - b. He sees God as being like the mind in a body.
 - 1) The mind is more than the body,

- 2) But it doesn't have an existence *without* the body.
 - c. While the Pantheist *equates* God *with* the universe, the Panentheist sees God as greater than the universe but that He cannot exist without it.
 - d. Alfred North Whitehead was probably the most well-known Panentheist.
 - e. Chances are, you will *never* meet a Panentheist; they're pretty rare today.
 - 8. Finally, we have **Polytheism**.
 - a. The Polytheist believes there are two or more gods *in* the universe but *not beyond* it.
 - b. The gods of Polytheism are finite deities who are active in the world.
 - c. The ancient Greeks & modern Mormons are examples of polytheists.
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9. It may help to visualize these 5 worldviews as they relate to one another.



B. So What

1. Now that we've covered all this, the question is, "So what?"
2. It's important we understand that one's worldview makes all the difference in how they live.
3. Our Ultimate Reality is the star we steer the ship of our lives by.
4. Let's see how this plays out in something current - Tsunami Relief.
 - a. The Theist sees charity & assisting in the relief effort as a virtuous act that pleases God.
 - 1) He/she will send money or go over to work because helping others is a good thing regardless if there's any personal reward that comes of it.
 - 2) Because God is loving & gracious, *being* loving & gracious are held as absolute values.
 - b. The Atheist sees compassion for the needy, not as an absolute, but purely in terms of what *benefit* it will bring to whoever he/she chooses to assign it to.
 - 1) If the atheist considers humanity as a whole, then personal acts of compassion have no real benefit because they don't accomplish much compared to overall need.
 - 2) If the atheist considers what benefit he/she will *personally* get out of charity, they won't give because they don't get anything, unless they received some recognition from others for their generosity.
 - 3) If the atheist just considers the *needy* & the benefit *they'll* receive, they're likely to give.

5. Consider how one's worldview alters one's ideas about death.
 - a. For the Atheist, death is the end of existence.
 - b. For the Theist, death is the entrance into the eternal state of either glorious bliss or horrifying torment.
6. So we can see that one's worldview makes a huge difference in one's perspective on life, & effects even the minute decisions we make every day.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Investigate

1. Chances are good most of us here tonight are Pure Theists.
2. If you're visiting, conned into coming by some Jesus Freak, and are *not* a Pure Theist, we're glad you're here.
3. We believe the Christian faith will more than stand up to a thorough investigation & invite you to do just that – *Investigate!*
4. Many of Christianity's most effective defenders *began* as critics & skeptics who set out to topple the Faith they thought so absurd.
5. Their research led them to a *conviction* the Bible is true & Christianity is the most consistent and coherent worldview.

B. Consider It

1. Next week in Pt. 2, we'll be taking a look at how some of these worldviews have spun off *philosophies* that have profoundly shaped the way people think & live.
2. Many say they believe in the Bible & the God of Scripture, but a careful examination of their lives shows a divorce between what they *say* is their Ultimate Reality and how it works itself out in their behavior.
3. There's an *error* somewhere in their worldview.
4. Let's end on that point – How about you?
5. If you're a Pure Theist (Christians are),
 - a. If God is the Ultimate Reality for you, do your beliefs, values, & behavior *flow* from that –
 - b. Or is there a break somewhere along the way from reality to behavior?
6. Until we meet again next week, meditate on that as you seek to apply the words of Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.