

Session Three: The Courage of Holiness Taking Every Thought Captive¹

Many Christians fail to stand up for Truth in their words and actions because they fear the opinion of the world. Although there are a number of reasons for our fear (we might be exposed, we might be mistreated, etc.), the most common is that we'll be rejected or ridiculed. The Bible calls this the "fear of man" and warns against it: *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.* (Proverbs 29:25). If we are not firmly convinced of the absolute rightness of our cause we will not have the courage necessary to resist being "squeezed into the world's mold." (Romans 12:2a, Phillips)

In order to live against the grain of the culture, the believer must know and believe that the world's perspective is radically distorted. The values of the world are a distortion of God's original intention, and because its values are not consistent with the real world of the Creator, they cannot be lived out without disastrous consequences. In order to make any sense of life, the world must live off of the "borrowed capital" of a biblical worldview.

Therefore, we do not understand in order to believe, but rather, as Augustine said, "I believe in order to understand." Similarly, Blaise Pascal said, "The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing." Or, in the words of Psalm 36:9, "In thy light, shall we see light." The believer who understands and believes this will not fear the opinion of man, but live in the "fear of the Lord [which] is the beginning of knowledge." (Proverbs 1:7)

I. The Importance of Worldview.

Everybody has a worldview. However, most people obtain their worldview by unconsciously *absorbing* it from the culture rather than consciously *adopting* it from Scripture. Identifying and mastering the components of the Christian worldview will strengthen the faith of any believer and help us to detect and refute error.

A. A definition of worldview.

*A worldview is a way of viewing or interpreting all of reality. It is a framework through which one makes sense of the data of life and the world.*²

B. The consequences of worldview.

Ideas have consequences. Belief determines behavior. Jesus said, "...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks..." (Matthew 12:34). Examples of the vital role of worldview can be seen in political science:

¹ *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* (2 Corinthians 10:5)

² Norman Geisler and William Watkins quoted in David Noebel, *Understanding the Times* (Summit Ministries).

*[The Founding Fathers] looked to their own Christian heritage of the idea of original sin, [and] they found confirmation of the notion that man is an unregenerate rebel who has to be controlled. They were inordinately confident that they knew what man always had been and what he always would be...private vices could be public benefits...an economically beneficent result would be providentially or 'naturally' achieved if self-interest were left free from state interference and allowed to pursue its ends. (Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*)*

*Ideas have real world consequences...human nature is not infinitely changeable but rather has its own laws. Therefore, there is a right life for man, a life in accord with our nature...It isn't a given of nature that people retrain their aggression, beget and nurture their offspring in marriage, exercise foresight, calculate rationally, or work to improve their condition. The wonder is not that people don't do it, but rather that they do...So,...it makes sense to ask...how society fosters people that dependably work and marry and are capable of rational calculation; how culture takes the aggressive, egotistical raw material of human nature each of us is born with and develops in its conscience, reason, and duty. (Myron Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare*, pp.5, 28)*

II. Presuppositions and the Christian Worldview.

A Christian with a sanctified intellect can see life for what it is. The non-Christian mind continues to suppress the truth of the Christian worldview. This is clearly seen in Romans 1:

A. All men know God.

*For although they knew (literally, **the**) God, they [did not glorify] him as God.... (Romans 1:21)*

How can Paul say that all men know God? He says it's because...

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made... (Romans 1:20)

This is similar to Psalm 19:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3)

1. There are no *philosophical* atheists.
2. There are many *practical* atheists.

B. Men do not want to know God.

God has given truth about Himself to all people. Yet because of the idolatry (worldliness) of sin, the truth he knows he suppresses:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. (Romans 1:18)

...they [do] not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. (Romans 1:28)

The [non-Christian] does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. – 1 Corinthians 2:14

C. Unbelievers are fools.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:22)

As a result, the unbeliever's is reduced to defending the indefensible:

[They are] without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

The phrase "without excuse" is literally, "without an apologetic," "without a defense".

Conclusion:

The unbeliever's view of the Creator's world is hopelessly distorted. In fact, he has no valid basis for his own beliefs. Having denied the truth of the God of the Bible he is reduced to borrowing from the biblical worldview as a foundation for his own house of cards. Therefore, the believer need not fear that the unbeliever may have it right after all. The world, for all its sophistication, flash, and dazzle, is really a "Vanity Fair" and fool's gold. We would be wise to heed the words of Colossians:

In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge... See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. (Colossians 2:3, 8)

Session Four: The Means of Holiness

“Sanctify Them by the Truth; Your Word is Truth”³

We have seen that the world of the Creator has been distorted by the fall. The world God made is now used and abused for ends that are contrary to His design. This misuse of God’s world is called *worldliness*. The “world” in Scripture is the *cosmos*, which refers to the arrangement that reflects the fallen values of sinful creatures. As such, the “world” takes what is good and perverts it to promote evil values. Worldliness then, is not primarily what the world *does* but what it *believes* and *values*.

Likewise, holiness is not first in what one *does*, but in what one *is*. As Christians we have come to believe and value that which is diametrically opposed to the world. Therefore, our difference is not always found in external things like dress, language, etc. (though sometimes it is), but in the God-centered agenda to which we have given our allegiance. Our commitment to God is expressed in all we do, and may sometimes be imitated by the world. But although the world may sometimes look and act like us, it never does so for the same reasons – it simply lives off of the “borrowed capital” of the biblical worldview. Therefore, in areas where the believer and unbeliever are the same, it is the unbeliever using the biblical worldview; it should NEVER involve the believer borrowing from the world.

What distinguishes the Christian way of life, then, is not first something external, but something spiritual. The explanation in the second century *Letter to Diognetus* of the uniqueness of the Christian life is so beautiful that it deserves to be quoted at length:

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom. For nowhere do they live in cities of their own, nor do they speak some unusual dialect, nor do they practice an eccentric lifestyle....While they live in both Greek and barbarian cities, as each one's lot was cast, and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship.

They live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like everyone else, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring. They share their food but not their wives. They are `in the flesh,' but do not live `according to the flesh.' They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws.

They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. They are unknown, yet they are condemned; they are put to death, yet they are brought to life. They are poor, yet they make many rich; they are in need of everything, yet they abound in everything. They are dishonored, yet they are glorified in their dishonor; they are slandered, yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when they are punished, they rejoice as though brought to life....Those who hate them are unable to give a reason for their hostility.

The *Letter to Diognetus* then compares the relationship of the church to the world with that of the soul to the body:

³ Jesus in John 17:17.

...In a word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians throughout the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body; likewise Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. The soul, which is invisible, is confined in the body, which is visible, in the same way, Christians are recognized as being in the world, and yet their religion remains invisible.

The flesh hates the soul and wages war against it, even though it has suffered no wrong, because it is hindered from indulging in its pleasures, so also the world hates the Christians, even though it has suffered no wrong, because they set themselves against its pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and its members, and Christians love those who hate them.

The soul is enclosed in the body, but it holds the body together; and though Christians are detained, in the world as if in a prison, they in fact hold the world together. The soul, which is immortal, lives in a mortal dwelling; similarly Christians live as strangers amidst perishable things, while waiting for the imperishable in heaven. Such is the important position to which God has appointed them.

In the spaces below, fill in some values of our culture. We will then seek to evaluate these from Scripture to determine whether they're worldly or godly.

<u>Cultural Values</u>	<u>Biblical Analysis</u>
Wealth	Mt. 6:19-21; Mt. 19:16-30; 1 Tim 6:6-10
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In order for the believer to effectively evaluate the values of the culture, she MUST be immersed in the Word of God. According to Jesus, we are *sanctified* (made holy) by the Word. Therefore, the Scriptures, when accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit, are the most potent change agent in the universe. How do the Scriptures function to change us? 2 Timothy 3:16-17 offers a four-step process by which the Bible produces holiness in us:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

I. Step One – Teaching: A Confrontation with Truth.

A. The content of the Word is the catalyst for change.

The Bible acts as a mirror for us. When we compare ourselves to the absolutely righteous standards of the Word of God, we usually observe a gap.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:21-25)

B. The content of the Word is exhaustive.

The Bible does not address every issue of life *directly*. However, it does address every issue of life either directly or indirectly. That is, all issues are covered in Scripture either in precept or principle. For this reason the Bible says that the Scriptures equip us for *every* good work.

II. Step Two – *Rebuke*: The Clash of Sin and Righteousness.

The word translated “rebuke” is translated elsewhere as “conviction”.

A. Conviction is the result of confrontation with the Truth.

1. The Bible exposes our sin.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

2. The *noetic* effects of sin necessitate the Word’s conviction.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:7)

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:3-5)

- B. Conviction has an objective basis.

Contrary to popular opinion, conviction is not a matter of feelings. Rather it is *a legal term used to denote the prosecution of a case against one who has broken the law.*

III. Step Three – *Correction*: The Answer to Conviction.

The Bible does not leave us in our guilt after conviction. Rather it provides instruction by which the wrong can be made right. The word translated *correction* means “to cause to stand.”

- A. Correction requires that we “put off” sinful behavior.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. (Ephesians 4:22)

- B. Correction requires that we “put on” righteous behavior.

...Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)

IV. Step Four – *Training*: The Habit of Correct Behavior.

The Scriptures provide not only direction to correct sinful behavior, but also that which is needed to continue in the paths of righteousness. The word translated *training* is the word for “discipline.” This suggests that habits of godliness require effort and hard work.

- A. Godly discipline requires constant exposure to the Word of God.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

To *dwell* means “to settle down, be at home.” The Word cannot have its dwelling if it is not taken in regularly.

- B. Godly discipline requires regular study of, and meditation on, the Word of God.

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2)

Meditation is reflection, mental exercise, rehearsal, and integration into thought and action.