

Changed Minds

CHANGED LIVES

**Growing into a Biblical understanding of life and the world
around us**

CHAPTER 1: Worldview Discipleship

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the **Spirit of wisdom and revelation**, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the **eyes of your heart may be enlightened** in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Eph. 1:17-19*

A number of years ago I saw a news report that sent me to my knees in prayer. The news media was reporting *another* famine in Ethiopia. I was saddened when they emphasized that this was happening in the “Christian part of the country.” I wondered how this could be. I had been taught that God blessed His people, so if this was true, then Christians all over the world should be blessed. If they were truly Christians and if God was truly God, then this should not be happening. I ached for my Christian brothers and sisters suffering in Ethiopia but had no idea what was causing the problem. Little did I know that in response to my prayers that day, God was going to take me on a long journey to discover the answer to my question.

Eventually, I found myself working as a missionary in Liberia, West Africa, during some of the worst years of that nation’s civil war. Again, I was faced with similar questions. How could a country where about 40 percent of the population claims to be Christian be experiencing such pain and physical poverty? I witnessed the destruction of the capitol city three times over a 7-year period and heard countless tales of suffering. Together with most of our friends we lost everything we owned, twice. At the same time, we experienced God’s provision of physical safety and I could see God’s faithfulness as we all learned to have a deep, abiding trust first-hand in God as protector. But still, the question was there; why did the Liberian Christians continue to suffer?

It would be easy to say that it is all too difficult for us to deal with troubling questions and so we should accept these problems with humility and learn how to live with them. Perhaps some nations are just not meant to be blessed like other nations. A pastor in Bulgaria once told me that God had forsaken their country and given it to Satan; there was nothing they could or should try to do about it. Something inside me rises up in indignant protest when I hear these kinds of words, especially coming from a Christian's mouth. If we as the church *choose* to do nothing, then that Bulgarian pastor was completely right; all we can do is meekly accept what comes our way and let Satan rule.

Over the years as I meditated and studied on why some nations suffered more than others, I had to accept that the situation is not simple. There are political systems and structural injustices which seem to bring more problems than solutions, no matter how good-intentioned they might be. Droughts, earthquakes and floods seem to **indiscriminately** bring pain and hardship. Wars and tyrannical dictators cause untold suffering, death and destruction. But even as I was realizing the complicated, bigness of the problems, I began to grow in my understanding of how big God truly is and that He has given us, as the church, the responsibility to be agents of change in our nations.

I was then faced with a new question: How does the church become an "agent of change"? I believe the major key God has given us as a church is discipleship. A disciple is a follower of Jesus under instruction in how to live out a Christian life. It is not about receiving or giving instruction alone, however. To be true "discipleship" the disciple must put the instruction into practice and learn to apply it in *all* areas of life. If we only learn how to act properly, or look good, but do not have our deep, inner thinking changed so dramatically that it affects every area of our lives as did the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament, then it is only a partial discipleship and the church is unable to have the impact God intends.

Outward behavior we easily see and we are good at instructing people in how they should behave as believers, i.e., do not steal, do not lie, and do not commit adultery. Given enough time, we are also able to instruct one another in the area of theology so people begin to understand what Christianity is all about, i.e., Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. However, there is a deeper level in us which dictates how we see and understand the world around us. It is much more difficult to see this part of us changed because we are often not even aware it exists. We will call this area of our being our "worldview."

You can think of worldview as something like a pair of glasses. The glasses determine how you see, not what there is to be seen. For example, if I look through a pair of red glasses, everything will look red or pink. In God's reality, those things may be white, blue or yellow, but I will be convinced they are pink because my glasses cause them to look pink to me. My worldview is defined by my red glasses and says: "The world is pink."

Another way to understand this is to think of a room in your house; most likely you identify the room and think of it by the furniture you see in the room.

"This must be the bedroom because there is a bed in it." The furniture is the first thing we see and often the floor is taken for granted. In this picture, the bed would symbolize our theological beliefs, other philosophical thoughts and our rules for living, while the floor is our worldview. The bed is supported by the floor even though we may not notice it.

Let's picture an apple. Imagine the color of the skin, the shine of its texture. You can smell it, and the taste is just a simple bite away. If we compare an apple to us, our behavior would be the skin of the apple; everyone sees it. Our understanding and knowledge are the flesh of the apple. They are easily exhibited; we can smell and taste them easily. At the center, hidden deep down inside is our worldview; the seeds in the core of the apple, supplying the life and power of re-creation to the apple.

Just as the red glasses color our world, the floor holds us up and the apple seeds provide ongoing life for apples trees, our worldview provides the filter, the foundation and the very "whys" behind our every action and belief. There is nothing we do or think that is not affected by our particular worldview. Yet, worldviews are hidden so well and taken for granted that often we are unaware of our own worldview and would be unable to easily define it. It is on this deeper level of belief that we as the church must be disciplined if we are going to see our communities and our nations changed and impacted by the Gospel.

We usually take our worldviews for granted and are as unaware of their existence as the air we breathe. Until they are challenged, we are oblivious to their influence on our lives. It is necessary to understand why we believe the way we do. Otherwise, when pressure comes, we will often unconsciously default to these basic belief systems although they may be contrary to the behavior and thought patterns we have been taught in church. Thus, people who on Sunday are sitting in church, taking part in

the communion service, may on Monday be lying, taking bribes or committing adultery. On a deeper level of their belief and value system they have not allowed themselves to be convinced and changed. Instead, they are following a belief system which is contrary to God. Perhaps this is partly what Paul referred to when he wrote:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Rom. 7:15-20)

To see lasting change in our nations and communities then we must think like Jesus, act like Jesus and believe like Jesus. We must grow into the same Biblical values and beliefs that Jesus has. Romans 12:2 tells us:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Until our minds are renewed and we practice God's will in all areas of life, we will be unable to effect true, lasting positive change in our nations.

II Corinthians 10:5 tells us we are to “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.” This means that those things that are contrary to what God thinks are to be destroyed in our hearts and minds. Notice that it is we who are to demolish these arguments, thoughts and beliefs. It is by submitting our thoughts to God and being disciplined in our thinking that we can see changes in our worldview.

Worldview is not the same as culture. Cultures are the outward expressions of our worldviews. Cultures contain the rules we live by and our proper actions based on the values of our worldview. People may hold the same worldview values, but express them in different cultural actions. Some cultures will have long speeches to greet one another; others will say a quick greeting, but perhaps sit for hours, visiting about different things. The value beneath both of these cultures might be the same: people and relationships are more important than anything else. They express themselves quite differently, but some parts of their worldviews are closely related.

Though God has not required us to live by any one specific culture and He has allowed us freedom to be creative in the outward cultural expressions of our values, He wants us to develop Biblical values. These values are what Jesus spent his time trying to instill in his disciples. It did

not happen overnight, even for the disciples who were taught daily by Jesus for 3 years. This process may take a lifetime, depending upon our openness to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:23-25), because we are easily blinded to our own basic worldview. I grew up in church so always believed I thought Biblically. I will never forget my surprise when I came to realize there were parts of the Bible I did not fully believe; much of the Old Testament had been pushed to a place of irrelevance because it was just for “way back then.” I did not recognize or understand the implications of the secular training I had been surrounded by in my culture that had blinded me, not allowing me to fully embrace Biblical values.

If we want to see our communities, and even nations, developed toward what God truly intends, then it is vital that we be “discipled” in our thinking and be able to identify the lies that Satan would have us live under through secular or animistic influences in our cultures. We cannot escape from the fact that what we truly believe has consequences for us. If we believe that the baby in the womb is only “tissue” and not a living being, then it follows that we can easily abort the tissue and go on with our lives, pretending nothing has happened. If we believe the witch doctor or some other local spiritual expert can help us get a job, then we will pay whatever fees are required to the witch doctor and do whatever the witch doctor requires in order to get the job, often causing even further economic hardship. Our beliefs determine what we do and how we act in every situation so if we want to live the way that God desires, then we must think the way God thinks.

Recently, I again heard a news report from Ethiopia about the famine going on there right now. This time the Christians were supporting one another and the people in their communities. Those whose animals died were being given animals by others. Where it should not be raining, it was raining because the Christians were praying. Areas where there were no Christians, it was dry as a bone. People who had been dying of starvation were prayed for and healed and then their neighbors continued to share their food. Miracle after miracle is happening there today. What is the difference this time? I believe it is because the people are acting on their faith, not submitting to their circumstances and old beliefs and God is blessing them.

As I have traveled on this journey begun so many years ago to discover why it seemed some were blessed and others were not, I have learned to pray for myself and those I have worked with, Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:17-19. “I pray that the glorious Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ better. Then you will have deeper insight. You will know the confidence that he calls you to have and the glorious wealth that God’s people will inherit.”

We all need the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” so we may know God better and to have the “eyes of our hearts enlightened” so we may know the hope to which He has called us. I have been challenged over and over again as I have discovered different ways my thinking has needed to change. It is an exciting journey to grow closer to God and to begin to think more and more like He intends, in other words, to grow more towards having a Biblical worldview.