

Contrasting Worldviews

In our current series in church, we have been studying a biblical worldview, what we believe and why, and the application of our beliefs to everyday life. In the messages I have shared, I have been looking primarily at the first 3 chapters of Genesis. Today, we will be looking at Genesis once again. I want to explore truths foundational to the Christian Worldview found in the first three chapters of Genesis, and compare aspects of them to unbiblical worldviews that are commonly held today. And then look at the implications of these worldviews. At a simple level, I am wanting to show you how our belief systems and worldviews are crucial and impact our lives.

Introduction

Your worldview is the lens through which you view and make sense of the world. This lens is comprised largely by what you believe to be true about reality and the world. It controls the way you understand things, which in turn determines how you make decisions and respond to things. Barna (2003:5) explains it like this:

Whenever we make a decision, we run it through a mental and emotional filter that allows us to make choices consistent with what we believe to be true, significant and appropriate. That filter is the result of how we have organized information to make sense of the world in which we live.

Throughout your life, you have gleaned information about the world and reality and organised this information to help you make sense of the world. This we all do, subconsciously, or consciously. Every experience, situation, piece of information or decision is then filtered through this world view. In this way, your worldview controls how you relate to everything in the world, whether God, other people or creation. Basically, your worldview determines the way you live. It governs the way you relate to everything in the world — God, creation and other people.

The problem that we are faced with today is that many Christians no longer have a Biblical worldview. This is evidenced in the reality that many Christians no longer live a life governed by and consistent with the Word of God.

In a recent survey amongst born-again Christians in America, the Barna Research Group found that only 9 percent of those surveyed had a 'Biblical worldview'. Only 50 percent of the pastors surveyed had a Biblical worldview. Dr Kevin Smith notes that the research done by South African Theological Seminary suggests these figures would be no better if the study were conducted in Africa instead of America (Smith, 2012:5).

Like I said, today we will look at truths foundational to the Christian Worldview found in the first three chapters of Genesis, and compare aspects of them to unbiblical worldviews that are commonly held today. And then look at the implications of these world views. We will look at truths concerning God, creation, man and sin.

- The biblical view of God will be compared to that held by atheism.
- The biblical view of creation will be compared to that held by pantheism.
- Man as viewed through scripture will be compared to the atheistic view of man.
- A biblical view of sin will be compared to the African Traditional view of sin.

1. God

a. Key truths from Genesis 1-3

The first statement in Genesis,

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1),

informs me that:

- **God is,**
- **and He does exist.**
- It also informs me that **He existed before the beginning**
- is **outside time** and **not confined to time.**

"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col 1:16-17)

- **He is eternal.**
- **God is a creator**
- **who created everything.**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” (Jn. 1:1-3)

- **He must be omnipotent** to do this.
- As He is the creator, **He is Sovereign** over His creation.
- He is also **separate and distinct** from it.
- He is **naturally separate** from His creation
- and He is also **morally separate** from evil and sin. This is seen in the fall of man and the consequent separation from God (Gen. 3:14-24).

““Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” (Lev 19:2)

Dr Kevin Smith in his book, *One God, Three Persons*, writes that there are “five essential qualities of a personal being” (Smith 2006):

- the ability to choose
- the ability to show compassion or feel emotionally
- the ability to speak relationally
- the ability to think rationally
- the ability to act morally.

We see all of these qualities outlined in Genesis 1-3 with respect to God.

i. God chose to create the heavens and the earth

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)

ii. He showed compassion, or exhibited the ability to “**feel emotionally**”

“For Adam also and for his wife the Lord God made long coats (tunics) of skins and clothed them.” (Gen 3:21, AMP)

“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” (Jas 5:11, NKJV)

iii. God **spoke relationally**. He is a relational God.

- He spoke amongst the Godhead

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”” (Gen 1:26)

- He spoke to Adam

“But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”” (Gen 3:9)

- He spoke to Eve

“Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?”” (Gen 3:13)

- He spoke to the Serpent

“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”” (Gen 3:14-15, ESV)

iv. God **thought rationally**.

“therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Gen 3:23-24)

God took man from Eden after the fall and ensured man would not access the tree of life. This involved thought and a consequent decision.

v. God acted morally.

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “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)

God described to Adam what was permissible and not permissible in the garden, i.e. what was right and wrong. He then described the consequence of violating this boundary.

Adam violated this boundary, and God fulfilled His word (Gen. 3:16-17; 22-24). Thus, from Genesis 1-3 we can see that **God is a personal being**.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God made them garments and clothed them. From this we see that God is inherently good. We can take this further by saying God is love. The animals that were killed to provide coverings for Adam and Eve were a type of the ultimate sacrifice that God would make out of love for mankind. When He saw it wasn't good for Adam to be alone, He made him a helper suitable (Gen. 2:18). God refers to Himself as “us” (Gen. 1:26) and also “he” (Gen. 1:27). Therefore God is a unified One, with more than one person in the Godhead (Mt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). He has always lived in community and is a relational God.

b. How Atheism views God

According to Njoroge, the word “atheist” finds its etymological origin in the Greek word “*Theos*” which means “God”, and the prefix “a”, which means “without” (2015). He clarifies that atheism cannot mean “without belief in God” as the “a” negates “*Theos*” or “God” and not “belief”. He concludes that Atheism refers to a belief system built around the idea that God is non-existent. This belief system is mentioned in Ephesians:

“remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Eph 2:12)

For the atheist, there is no ultimate Higher Power or God. All that exists is physical matter and there is no unseen world. Therefore in this worldview, the world evolved

by “chance”, with no intelligent Designer or Creator. In essence, history is going nowhere. It has no meaning, no purpose, no destiny.

The words from Ecclesiastes ring true in this worldview: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!... Everything is meaningless.’” (Ecc 1:2, NIV)

If the universe is a “closed system” and all species including humans evolved and were not created, there can be no ultimate purpose in life, no meaning and no destiny. Everything happened by chance, and will happen by chance. There is no purpose because there is no higher power or God or creator to attribute purpose to his creation.

It follows logically from this belief system, that if this is all there is, without any purpose or other spiritual reality, we may as well, “live for the moment”. The outworking of this worldview is found in Eccl 8:15a:

“So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry...” (Ecc 8:15a, NKJV)

This way of life is known as hedonism. Seeking pleasure. “If it feels good in the moment, just do it”.

“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” (2Ti 3:1-4)

Paul could easily have been describing much of the Western World today. Unfortunately, the implications of atheistic worldviews has impacted many of us and we find ourselves in a place where much of the West has little fear or love for God, no sense of eternal destiny or accountability for lifestyle. Egotism (love of self), materialism (love of money) and hedonism (love of pleasure) seem to reign supreme.

This is contrary to a biblical view. According to the Bible, there is a God who created the universe, - what is seen as well as the unseen spirit realm (Gen. 2:1; 3:24; Col. 1:16). He created out of choice and love (Gen. 1:1-2), with purpose and design (Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 139:13-16; Eph. 2:10).

The implications of an atheistic belief are devastating:

- If there is no God, there can be no objective moral law or standard to determine right from wrong.

Think about that for a moment. No objective moral law or standard. Then I myself am left to determine right from wrong. And you. And there is no basis to evaluate whose judgement is correct. In effect there is no absolute, no truth apart from, “your truth” and “my truth”, which are actually terrifying phrases when we think about it logically. People like those phrases because for some, emotionally, it feels good. “Your truth”. “My truth”. In reality you see, it means there is no law-giver outside of man. And we can all at least agree with the words of the late Malcolm Muggeridge that:

“The depravity of man is at once the most empirically verifiable reality but at the same time the most intellectually resisted fact.”

- If the universe evolved purely by natural means, then it just exists and any “purpose” for its existence can only be that which is attributed it by the creature.
- If your god is that which determines purpose, meaning, and destiny then in this sense, the atheist becomes his own god.

2. Creation

a. Key truths from Genesis 1-3

In Genesis 1:1 we see that God preceded matter and created everything “*ex nihilo*”, or out of nothing. He created the visible physical world (Gen. 1:1; 3-5; 14-19). This includes the physical universe, which is comprised of the “earth, sun, moon and stars”. It also includes the natural world (Gen. 1:11-12; 20-21; 24-27). This is made up of plants, insects, fish, birds, mammals and humans as well as humans. All of this is understood from Genesis 1.

God also created the ‘invisible spiritual realm’

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” (Gen 2:1)

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.” (Col 1:16)

All of these creations were designed and brought into being with His purpose in mind.

The world is finite, as it had a beginning (Gen. 1:1). It is also progressing towards our infinite Creator’s conclusion for it and as such will have an end (Rev. 20-21).

We read in Genesis 1 that God fashioned His creation in an orderly and organized manner, monitoring and assessing each stage of creation to ensure it was “good” before progressing. This shows **intentionality, design and purpose**.

Biblically, creation is **separate from God, dependent upon God** for existence.

“And He Himself existed before all things, and in Him all things consist (cohere, are held together).” (Col 1:17, AMP)

The apex of God’s creation was man, whom God fashioned **in His own image** (Gen. 1:26-30). As such, **man is not an animal**, but is **separate from the rest of creation**.

b. How Pantheism views creation

As a world and life view pantheism has had a broad and persistent influence in the world. Much of the Far Eastern world for most of its recorded history has been influenced by pantheism. The word “Pantheism” originated from the Greek “*pan*”, “all,” and *Theos*, “God”. There are many forms and types of pantheism, but in general, the pantheist believes that God is the one reality underlying, emanating or manifesting through all things.

The pantheist views creation as being “**ex Deo**”, that is “**out of God**”.

His creation remains part of Him. Any evil or deficiencies evident in these emanations from God are there by necessity. Thus God, to the pantheist, is the origin of both good and evil and is thus **contradictory** within Himself. He is in effect **not holy**.

He is not a person, but rather an “impersonal force” that cannot be known. Creation was not a decision taken by God but rather a “metaphysical necessity” essential to God, who in this sense is dependent upon His creation and **not complete in His perfection**.

Pantheism also teaches that no individual reality exists separate from God, nothing is real and everything is an illusion.

It's important we are aware of these different belief systems as we watch movies and allow our children to do so. If you cast your mind back to that movie, Avatar, you will remember many pantheistic aspects to the movie. We must be able to think through the ideas being proposed in the things we are being entertained by so that we are not taken in by the lies of the enemy because our emotions are stirred and our minds are switched off.

Even when we consider certain type of medicine and healing practices, it's important that we are cognisant of the belief systems behind them and the thinking around manipulating energy. Energy medicine, acupuncture, Reiki, homeopathy, Ayurveda, traditional Chinese medicine, and so forth focus on manipulating the body's energy fields. These all can be viewed to have pantheistic principles and elements to them.

In the biblical worldview, God is a separate and distinct person and chose to create everything “**ex nihilo**” or out of nothing. He is **holy, completely good** and **distinct from** His creation. Any evil or deficiencies in the world originated from the fall of man and not from God. God, and His created world are real.

3. Man

a. Key truths from Genesis 1-3

- Man is a **created being** who was fashioned and **given life by God**

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26-27)

Thus, man is the created being, both dependent upon and accountable to God His Creator

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col 1:16-17)

- God created man **in His own image** (Gen. 1:26-27).

This attributes significance and “**infinite and eternal value**” to man. As such, man is separate and distinct from the rest of creation.

According to Pecota, five characteristics for man are consequent to being an “image-bearer” of God:

i. Man has the **ability to reason**

“Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.” (Gen 2:19)

ii. the **freedom to choose**

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Gen 3:6)

iii. a **sense of “right and wrong”**

“Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil...” (Gen 3:22a)

iv. **“self-awareness”**

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” (Gen 3:7-8)

v. a **spiritual being** with an inbuilt **need to be in relationship with God**

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “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)

If man is God's image bearer, no particular people group is superior to another, whether on account of skin colour, background, or gender. This attributes **dignity** to all men alike. It also reveals another aspect of the nature of man. God exists in relationship in the Godhead, so man must also be **relational** by nature and was created to live in communion with God and with man.

At the point where God spoke of creating man, he spoke of the **purpose** of man (Gen. 1:26). Thus man was created with a purpose and destiny

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”” (Gen 1:26)

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” (Gen 2:15)

God blessed man and gave him a mandate to fill the earth, rule and have dominion over creation. In this regard, we are “image bearers”. We were created to rule and reign in our domain even as our God does in His. He gave us the instruction to “fill

the earth” (Gen. 1:28) in so doing gave us the privilege of bringing forth new life into the world.

When Adam and Eve were initially created, they were a perfect expression of God’s image (Gen. 1:27-31). When they disobeyed God (Gen. 3:6-7), sin entered man and this image became fragmented and “flawed”. God is restoring this through his Son (Col. 3:10).

b. How Atheism views man

Atheism views man as a current end product of an evolutionary journey that has taken millions of years. This evolutionary journey began with “spontaneous generation” when by chance all the necessary constituents for life came together in the correct manner. Atheists hold that the first form of life was a single-celled amoeba that slowly upgraded and evolved via “survival of the fittest” into more complex creatures and eventually man.

This is contrary to a biblical worldview, which holds that God is life and gave life to His creation. Being made in the image of God, man was the apex of God’s creation). This sets man apart from the rest of creation and means that man is significant and of “infinite and eternal value”.

For the atheist, man can have no more value and worth than a mammal, as both evolved by chance. When taken to its logical conclusion, application of this belief has terrible ramifications. Abortion, euthanasia and genocide are completely justifiable. In fact, this type of thinking was what propagated Hitler’s plan to speed up the evolution of a genetically superior people.

For the atheist who has no God and spiritual reality, there is no ultimate purpose, no life after death and no accountability to any higher objective being or standards. Thus means that each individual assigns his own purpose to himself as he wills, lives according to his own subjective preferences, “truth” and standards and has no eternal destiny.

4. Sin

a. Key truths from Genesis 1-3

When God created everything, His creation, including man, was perfect and there was no sin or evil in it. Throughout Genesis one, God evaluates His creation step by step and declares it to be “good”. After God created man He said His creation was “very good” and then rested as his creation was complete (Gen. 1:31; 2:1-3).

Sin is failure to comply with God’s laws and standards in “act, attitude or nature”. God gave Adam explicit instructions, as well as the requisite consequences of disobedience:

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “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 2:15-17)

Adam disobeyed God:

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.” (Gen 3:6-7)

Sinned and evil entered the world. Adam was representative of all men. Consequently all men everywhere are born with a sinful nature because of the fall

“Therefore, just as 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 effects of sin are far-reaching:

i. **Separation from God** or “spiritual death”.

The relationship between man and God was broken.

ii. All of creation including man came **under a curse**

“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and

dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”” (Gen 3:14-19)

iii. The nature and inclination of man became **inherently sinful**

“For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:22-24)

iv. The **consequence of sin is death**, or **“eternal separation from God”**.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 6:23)

Man’s purposes of relating with God and having dominion over creation were negatively impacted by the fall. In order to be reconciled and restored in these two areas, we need to acknowledge our sinfulness so that we recognize the need for a Saviour.

b. How African Traditional Religions view sin

The African Traditional view of life is cyclical in nature, and seen as an “eternal cycle of life and death”. Life in the physical realm is viewed as temporary in nature, and death is viewed as a door into the spirit realm. There is no judgement after death, as in the Christian worldview (Rom. 14:9-12; Heb. 9:27), but rather roles as ancestral spirits, and gods acting on behalf of the Supreme God towards man currently living

in the physical realm (Boafo 2015). Reincarnation and re-entrance into the physical world is possible.

For the Christian, truth and absolutes are from God and found in the Bible (Ps. 199:160; 2 Tim. 3:16). Sin is an innate, inborn state of being in every person (Rom. 3:10,23). For the African Traditionalist, truth is understood to be that which is generally known to be true by the community and represented as such by the elders (Chalk 2009:167). This is orally passed on from generation to generation and may differ from community to community. Sin, for the African Traditional religionist, is not an innate human condition. It is two-fold in nature (Boafo 2015). Firstly it involves violation of the codes of the ancestral spirits and gods, which then need to be appeased through various sacrifices and rituals. Secondly, since the maintenance of community harmony and “life-force” is of utmost importance in the African Traditional Worldview, anything that violates this is viewed as wrong and sin (Chalk 2009). When the African Traditionalist disrupts this community harmony, he can appease through the requisite sacrifices and/or rituals to the gods or ancestral spirits. It is believed this re- establishes balance between God and man. According to Boafo, salvation for the traditional religionist, is the “restoration of harmony” (2015). Biblically, everyone is sinful by nature and requires a saviour. This Saviour was Jesus Christ and He was the ultimate sacrifice for man’s sins (Jn. 3:16-17; Rom. 6:23). No other sacrifices are necessary (Heb. 10:12).

Conclusion

Issues of God, creation, sin and man were studied in Genesis 1-3 and compared to unbiblical worldviews. It was evident that worldview implications are far-reaching.

Biblically, there is a God who purposefully created the world. Purpose, meaning and an objective moral law come from Him. Atheists exist in a world where there is no God and no objective higher moral law. There is no life after death or ultimate purpose and destiny.

Biblically, God created the world “*ex nihilo*”. He is separate from it and complete in Himself. Pantheists believe that creation is “*ex Deo*”. Everything is a part of God

including good and evil. The logical conclusion of this is that we are all emanations from God and as such don't need a Saviour.

According to the Bible, man was created in the image of God, which attributes eternal value and significance to man as a being. The atheistic world evolved by chance. The logical outworking of this is that man has no more value and significance than an animal.

Finally, according to the biblical worldview, sin is inherent in every man (Rom. 2:23) and the standard for this is the Word of God (Ps. 119:160; 2 Tim. 3:16). In the African Traditional worldview, sin is seen as either a violation of the harmony of the community or offending the ancestors and spirits. Rituals and sacrifices are used to appease the gods and ancestors when "sins" are committed. This has major implications in terms of the understanding of the need for a Saviour as well as recognition of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus was (Rom. 2:23-26).

All scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise indicated

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