

We're continuing the series we started last week on spiritual formation. We've defined spiritual formation as the process of intentionally opening our lives to the work of the Spirit to become more like Christ. It's about growing and becoming mature in our faith.

Last week we asked the question, whose job is it? We said spiritual formation is 100 percent us and 100 percent God, but God's 100 percent is far more than ours. We also identified four ways followers of Jesus have always viewed as central to being formed into the image of Jesus: worldview, spiritual practices/disciplines, life with others, and life experiences.

Now we will focus on worldview. Our worldview is the lens through which we view life; what we know and believe to be true about this world and our existence in it. A worldview is how one makes sense of the world. It's like a map of reality. It goes deeper than just how we think but also defines what we value, love, and even worship. And all of this ultimately leads to action — how we live.

An example comes from the TV series *Mad Men*, which revolved around the conflicted world of Don Draper. Draper's high-level position at his advertising agency gives him all the money and power a man could want, and he wields it in each episode. In the first episode, Draper explains to a woman in the office the essence of his marketing job and his entire worldview,

"What you call love was invented by guys like me to sell nylons. You're born alone, and you die alone, and this world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make you forget those facts. But I never forget. I'm living like there's no tomorrow because there isn't one."

That is a worldview. And it's one held by many. Of course, a Christian worldview is quite different from that. It's more than just knowing facts about the Bible; it's viewing the world through the lens of what's real and what's true, as revealed by God through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. It's being able to say with C.S. Lewis,

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

What Lewis is saying is a Christian worldview answers the most basic questions about life.

Who are we? As human beings, are we just a random product of billions of years of evolution, or are we created beings? Is our fundamental identity rooted in race, gender, social class, and nationality, or is it rooted in the fact that we've been made in the image of God? Where are we? Do we live in a purely natural world governed by cause and effect, as

some scientist might tell us? Do we live in a world to which we owe allegiance as to a god, as a pantheist would suggest? Or do we live in a good, though transient world created by God? What's wrong?

A worldview has to account for the reality of evil in the world. Is evil just an illusion? Is it the result of the inequity of our social structures? Or is it rooted in the idea that humanity has rebelled against God and therefore is out of line with our created intention? With that, how do we even know what's right and wrong? Does this come from a God whose character is good; or is it determined by us based on what makes us happy, or what allows us to survive on this planet?

What's the solution? Is it in humanity evolving into something better than we are now? Is it in finding the right political system? Is it to learn we're all one with the cosmos? Or is it in the person and work of Jesus, through whom God has acted, is acting, and will act to deal with the weight of evil set up by human rebellion? To bring his world to the end for which it was made, so that it resonates fully with his own presence and glory?

Paul came to Athens, one of the world's great cities

To give you a better idea at what I'm talking about here, I want to look at the New Testament book of Acts, chapter 17. Let me give you some background. This took place during the apostle Paul's second missionary journey when he visited cities like Philippi, Corinth, and Ephesus. Perhaps the greatest city he visited was Athens.

The golden age of Athens took place about 500 years before Paul got there. The Persians had destroyed the city completely, but the Athenians defeated them and rebuilt their city in glorious fashion. They constructed grand structures like the Parthenon and the Acropolis. They became the first example of democracy in human history. Athens was a center of philosophical learning led by Socrates and Plato. It was an age of art. Praxiteles developed the classical form of human sculpture, later imitated by Michelangelo.

By the time Paul got to Athens, it was in a shadow of its former glory, but still a center of intellectual excellence and an impressive sight. It was also a city full of idols. Hundreds of gods were part of the Greek worldview, and it was inevitable Paul would confront that in Athens. I want us to look at how Paul went about that and what it might teach us about our own worldview and that of those around us.

Paul was distressed by this city full of idols

Acts 17:16 tells us what Paul saw.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. v. 16

As Paul was touring Athens, taking in all the sights, what left the greatest impression on him wasn't the architecture, history, or wisdom of the city, but its idolatry. When it says, "the city was full of idols," the word used means the city was smothered by them. One visitor said it was easier to find a god in Athens than a man! It was filled with temples, shrines, statues, and altars. There were statues of Athena, Apollo, Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Bacchus, Neptune, and Diana. They were made of gold, silver, ivory, and marble by the finest Greek sculptors.

I'm sure Paul appreciated their beauty, but as he reflected on what he saw, it says he "was greatly distressed." Luke, who wrote this, was a doctor and used a medical term sometimes used to describe a seizure. It's like Paul had a fit over what he saw! It ticked him off. So what did he do?

Paul confronts the Athenian's Worldview

So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. vv. 17-21

Paul might have been ticked off, but his actions were positive and constructive. He didn't throw up his hands in despair, or fall into a deep depression, or cuss out the Athenians. Rather, he told them about "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection." In essence, he offered them a different worldview.

He did this with three groups, each with their own worldview. First, he confronted the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue, most likely on the Sabbath. He reasoned with them, showing from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. This is like speaking to church people or religious people today.

Second, he did this in the marketplace with people who were just passing by. This is like engaging in conversation today with people in a park, mall, or restaurant. He did this not just on the Sabbath but "day by day," mixing it up with anyone he could get to engage with him.

Thirdly, he did this with two groups of philosophers, the Epicureans and the Stoics. This is like talking to intellectuals in a university today. The Epicureans were basically atheists; at least they believed the gods to be so remote they didn't have any involvement with our lives. They denied

life after death. They believed this life is all there is, and we should get the most out of it. Their motto was "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Like Don Draper, they lived for the moment which, let's face it, is how many people think today.

The Stoics, on the other hand, were pantheists. They believed everything is God; God is in the rocks, trees, and everything else. Their attitude toward life was one of resignation because the world is controlled by fate. So, you have to learn to take whatever comes your way. Their motto was "grin and bear it." There are people today who feel the best thing they can do is to take whatever comes and handle it the best they can. It's a fatalistic way of looking at life.

Notice the initial reaction of these two groups to Paul and this new worldview he was presenting. Some of them called him a "babbler," which literally means seed-pecker. They saw Paul as a little bird in the marketplace going around pecking at seeds, collecting fragments of truth from philosophies he's picked up along the way and trying to impress people. They smiled and dismissed him.

Others were intrigued by the fact that he talked about a new god named Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. They thought, "Oh, how cool. Maybe we can add another god to our list." These were the kind of people who loved to sit around and talk about the latest ideas. They want to hear more so they invite Paul to speak to them at the Areopagus. Translated, that means "Mars Hill." It had been a place where the judicial court of Greece met. In Paul's day, it was a place where leaders kept watch over the city's religion and morals.

Before we look at what Paul said there, I want to ask you, are you willing to mix it up with spiritually interested people like Paul did? It's not always easy. People may misunderstand you. They may call you a seed-pecker. But, like Paul, we need to be able to converse about worldviews with religious people who have no clue about what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus; random people we run into in malls, restaurants, parks, gyms, bars, and soccer fields; thinking people like university professors and students. The worst thing we could do is stay so busy with church that we never shine the light of Christ in those dark places. Paul saw the city full of idols and was distressed. Are you distressed? But he also *did* something. He didn't retreat to his holy huddle; he went to where people were at; he got into the fray and reasoned with people.

Paul Offers a Christian Worldview

What did he say? His message is a classic statement of a Christian worldview. It has an introduction, body, and a conclusion. Look how he starts out.

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. vv. 22-23

Notice he begins where people are at. He doesn't denounce them or attack their idolatry. He almost pays them a compliment: "People of Athens, as I've been walking about your city, I've noticed you're a very religious people." These people have a religious worldview. They're like people today who call themselves "spiritual" but want nothing to do with organized religion. The best research shows 80 percent of Americans believe in some form of God. Only one-third believe in the God of the Bible, but 80 percent at least believe in some kind of higher power or force.

Then Paul said, "As I've been walking about, I found an altar to an unknown god. Well, let me introduce you to Him." It's a great introduction. It builds a bridge between his worldview and theirs.

He goes on and tells them several things about God. Each of them addressed the misconceptions in their worldview. First, and this is fundamental to a Christian worldview, God is the creator of all things.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands." v. 24

Paul said that God is the Maker, not the one who was made. He made us and everything else that exists in the universe. He's the Creator of all things and Lord of all. He can't be confined by some temple we set up for him. He's far too big for that.

Next, he says God is the sustainer of all things.

And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. v. 25

As the giver and sustainer of life, God isn't looking for anything from man. The Greek gods had to be constantly appeased with gifts, or they'd get very upset. But the true God is the giver and sustainer of life. If for a split second He withdrew his hand from us we'd all disintegrate into nothing. It's by his grace that we even continue to breath!

Third, he says God is the ordainer of all things.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. vv. 26-27

The Athenians believed they were a cut above all other people. Paul sets them straight and says, "Every nation came from the same man. Not only that, God determines the course of those nations. He didn't just wind up the world and walk off into the sunset. He determines the fate of nations. And notice God's purpose in this. He works to accomplish the one great reason for which humans exist: that we might seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him."

God ordains the events of human history to this end — that people will be motivated to search for Him. A Christian worldview sees purpose behind everything — the bad as well as the good. History is God's story. God ordains all things to show people they need God and to motivate

them to search for him. And Paul corrects a misconception many of them had, saying, "he's not far from each of us." God isn't a force. He's personal. He wants to be found. He's not playing hide and seek. In all he does, he's saying, "I want you to know me. I want to be in relationship with you."

Paul continues and says this God is the Father of all.

For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. vv. 28-29

We're all God's "offspring" — he created us all. And since he created us, it's absurd to think of him as a gold or silver statue we make. Again, we're *his* children; he made us; we didn't make him. Paul even quotes one of their own poets to show this. It's interesting that Paul read their own literature and was able to quote it.

And then comes his conclusion. A good conclusion calls people to action. Every worldview has implications for how we live our lives. It's not just head knowledge.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. v. 30

Remember, a Christian worldview has to answer the question, "What's wrong?" The need for personal repentance implies we are wrong. *We* need to change. The Bible calls this sin. Repentance means to turn from our sin. The main reason Paul calls for them to repent is their idolatry. A Christian worldview will ultimately unmask our idols.

Today, we're not that different from them. Our culture is dominated by idols. They're mainly what the prophet Ezekiel called, "Idols of the heart" (Ezekiel 14:3). An idol of the heart is anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you look to in order to give you what only God can give. An idol is anything so central to your existence that if you lose it, you wouldn't feel your life is worth living. It could be a relationship, or the success of a favorite sports team, or getting your child into the right university.

Scott Hafeman wrote,

"Idolatry, whether ancient or modern, is the futile attempt to look for our lives to anyone or anything other than the one true Creator and Provider. Who do I thank when things go well? Who do I look to when things go badly? What's my source of security? Where do I gain my sense of worth in the world? What am I striving to achieve in life? The answers to questions like these will help determine whether we're honoring God as God or whether we're idolaters; whether that means we're praying to a stone image, drooling with envy over the car in our neighbor's driveway, or latching onto the latest self-help strategy."

A Christian worldview defines what's gone wrong with this world as fundamentally a problem within the heart of man. We've traded in the true God for cheap substitutes.

But a Christian worldview will also tell us what God is doing to make things right. That's what Paul ends with.

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." v. 31

How will God make things right? Paul points to a man and a day. The man is Jesus, who God raised from the dead. This would have been very offensive to the Greek mind because they believed in the immortality of the soul, not the body. That's why it says in v. 32, "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered..." But for Paul, this solitary act proved Jesus is Lord of all. In fact, at the end of history, he'll stand as Judge.

And that points to a day. A Christian worldview answers the question, "Where's history headed?" What's the ultimate solution to the evil we see in the world today? Paul says, "he (Jesus) will judge the world with justice." A day will come when all the wrongs will be made right. Isn't that what we long for? Our world is filled with injustice. But a Christian worldview says a day is coming when justice will come through the person of Jesus.

That may scare us, but it should really comfort us. God's judgment and even his wrath flow from his love and delight in his creation. He'll judge evil and injustice because it destroys the welfare of those he loves. As Becky Pippert puts it in her book, *Hope Has Its Reasons*,

"Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it. Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference. God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer, which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being."

A Christian Worldview is shaped by the Bible's storyline

You can see from Paul's message at Mars Hill what a Christian worldview looks like in contrast to others. In short, a Christian worldview includes four things that make up the storyline of the Bible.

Creation: God created all things out of nothing. Humans are uniquely created in the image of God, placed in a garden and given dominion under God to rule. The world was made for human flourishing, a place to live with joy and peace with God and with one another.

Fall: Adam and Eve rejected God's rule over them. We call this, "the fall," and because they represented all of humanity, their action affects us too. We have, through our attitudes and actions, become idolaters. This rebellion results in physical and spiritual death.

Redemption: Thankfully, the loving Creator is for us. Though he hates sin, he's determined to redeem the world and rescue fallen sinners. At the center of this plan is God's Son, Jesus, the Messiah, who through his death and resurrection, will restore His people.

Restoration: The story doesn't end with redemption. God has promised to renew the whole world. The restoration of all things will take place when Christ returns to judge sin and evil. God will purge this world of evil once and for all and usher in a new heaven and new earth.

These four parts off the Bible's storyline answer the big questions for us: Who are we? Where are we? What's gone wrong? What's the solution? How will things be made right?

Seeing life through the lens of God's truth is crucial for spiritual formation. Sometimes we forget Jesus called us to love God with not just all our heart, soul, and strength, but also with all our mind (Luke 10:27). We love God with our mind by developing a worldview shaped by Scripture. If I could give you one encouragement about how to develop a Christian worldview, it would be to immerse yourself in God's Word, the Bible. And then as you do that, ask what does it mean to think biblically and Christianly about all the different areas of life in our modern world: technology, politics, sports, money, the environment, family, etc.

Let me end with a quote from a man named Blaise Pascal who lived in the 1600s. Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, theologian, and writer. In his short 39 years of life, he made many contributions and inventions in several fields. He even invented an early digital calculator. Pascal said,

"Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies all his dignity and his merit; and his duty is to think as he ought. Now the order of thought is to begin with ourselves, and with our author and our end."

And so, my challenge to you is to think about your thinking, and let your thinking be shaped by the truth of God's word.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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