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Why Worldview Understanding is Important for Witness

By Freddy Davis

When I served in Japan as a missionary and had the opportunity to share my faith with a Japanese person, it was generally not enough for me to simply share the Christian faith. The worldview background of Japanese culture consists of a unique combination of Animism and Far Eastern Thought. Japanese Shinto is an animistic belief system that dates back into prehistory in Japan, and the entire foundation of Japanese culture is based on beliefs that come out of this worldview.

But Japanese Shinto is not the only influence in the country. Buddhism from China, along with its Confucian ethical structure, entered the country around 600 A.D. Over the intervening 1500 or so years, it has also become firmly established in Japanese society – to the degree that it also has a strong influence on Japanese religious beliefs.

The Christian faith is based on a theistic worldview – a faith that is very different from the animistic and Far Eastern Thought beliefs that dominate Japanese culture. In fact, Christian Theism is different enough that simply explaining the gospel message does not even make clear sense to most Japanese. To help it make sense, those wishing to share the gospel need to give some kind of explanation of a theistic worldview. In other words, instead of starting a witness using an assumption that the hearer already understands New Testament theistic concepts, as is the traditional starting point when sharing with most Americans, we need to start with Genesis and explain who God is and what he is like.

In modern times, this more basic worldview approach to sharing our faith is increasingly needed in America, too. Naturalism now dominates American society, and many people raised in this naturalistic environment don't understand theistic concepts. Add to that the massive number of people who have immigrated into the U.S. from places with different worldview backgrounds, and the need to express our witness based on a worldview paradigm becomes even more evident.

When sharing one's faith, there is a core block of information that comprises the essence of the faith. This is true regardless of which faith you are discussing. This core information comprises the essence of the faith, and is what must be communicated in order for someone else to understand and accept it as true.

What is Worldview?

Before we go any further, however, we need to look a little more deeply at the very concept of worldview. We can't just assume that people understand what that is – in spite of the fact that the word has become increasingly prominent in modern society.

A worldview is the assumptions people make about the nature of reality. While at first glance this may seem a bit complicated, it is not. All we are talking about here is a set of beliefs that seem so obvious, it is difficult to accept that there are people who don't believe them. But the truth is, that is exactly the situation that exists in modern American society. When two people who are interacting with each other have beliefs that are based on different worldviews, they simply don't believe the other person has their head on straight. And when this kind of dichotomy is prominent in society as a whole, you end up with the culture wars

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that are currently dividing contemporary American society.

To break it down even further, individual worldviews are defined by how they answer three particular questions. These questions are:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is the ultimate a person can accomplish in this life?

Regardless of the particular faith we are dealing with, the adherents of every religious expression that wishes to share its beliefs with others must communicate this specific information. This truth applies to our own Christian faith, as well. In fact, the gospel message is nothing more than sharing with other people how the Bible answers the three questions above.

How the Christian Faith Answers the Three Essential Questions

So just how does the Christian faith answer these three questions? Perhaps you are familiar with one, or several, witnessing methodologies that have been taught in Christian circles over the years. Some of the more prominent witnessing methods include the Romans Road, Evangelism Explosion, FAITH, The Four Spiritual Laws, Steps to Peace with God, and there are numerous others. The truth is, every witnessing method in existence is nothing more than a way to express the answers to these three questions. So, just what does that look like?

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?

Ultimate reality, based on a biblical worldview, is found in the God of the Bible. He is eternal, all powerful, and all knowing. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the natural universe, and the material universe only exists because he conceived

of and created it. It exists in the form it does because he determined to create it the way it exists.

2. What is a human being?

According to a biblical worldview, the reason God created the natural universe was to provide a living place for a particular creature he wanted to create – human beings. This creature was to be special. While God also created other living creatures, mankind was created to be a person in his own image. This simply means that he put in man the personhood characteristics that are found in himself. This included such things as spiritualness, self-awareness, free will, the ability to have and use self-conscious knowledge, creativity, analytical ability, and the like. Most importantly, he made man in a way that allowed for a personal, self-conscious relationship to exist between himself and man. For a time, following the creation of humanity, this kind of actual personal relationship existed between God and Adam and Eve.

While God created man exactly as he envisioned, Satan entered the picture and tempted these first humans to disobey God. When the disobedience occurred, the perfect relationship that had existed was broken, and a separation was created. While still a person created in the image of God, humanity became fallen.

3. What is the ultimate a person can accomplish in this life?

When the Fall occurred, God determined that he would not let it stand. With that, he created a way for the fallenness to be reversed, and progressively revealed to humanity the full nature of that plan.

Throughout history, after the Fall, God revealed to various people the nature of sin and forgiveness. In particular, it was graphically demonstrated in the Jewish sacrificial system. There, an animal without blemish was sacrificed

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for the sins of the one offering the sacrifice.

Actually reversing the consequences of the Fall, however, would require the atoning sacrifice of an actual sinless human being. As no mortal human was capable of living a life without sin, God ultimately came to earth in the form of a human person, lived a perfect life to qualify as the atoning sacrifice, died upon the cross as the sacrifice, then rose from the dead to demonstrate that he did, indeed, have power over sin and death.

With that, all who would receive Christ by faith would have their own sin forgiven, and have the relationship with God restored. In this ultimate sacrificial act, the potential for salvation from sin was accomplished. The way was paved for individual human beings to enter into a personal relationship with God. All that remains is for each person to acknowledge their need for God, repent from their sins, and personally accept the sacrifice Christ made for them on the cross.

Worldview and Witness

While learning the particular elements of various witnessing programs can take some effort, it is very helpful to realize that no matter what particular program a person chooses to use, all of them contain essentially the same content. The Christian gospel message is nothing more than the bibli-

cal answer to the three essential worldview questions. If this core knowledge is understood and received, a personal relationship with God is accomplished.

When one has a desire to share the message of salvation with someone else, this is the content that must be communicated in that message. If that knowledge is fully known, it becomes very easy to keep focused on the heart of the message, and effectively share the gospel in virtually any circumstance.

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