



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**How to Organize Discipleship Training - Part 2**  
***The Need for a Worldview Paradigm***

By Freddy Davis

Traditionally, a study of the topic of worldview, and even the use of a worldview paradigm, was unnecessary in American churches in most situations. The value of understanding worldview concepts comes into play when non-biblical beliefs are prominent in a society, and that did not used to be the case in America.

Worldview skills have traditionally been needed more for people who served as missionaries in places where a majority of the population, or even large pockets of some minority, have a non-biblical faith background. Worldview knowledge and skills provide a means for effectively communicating biblical concepts and ideas to people who have beliefs that come from a different place.

Even a quick glance at modern American society makes it evident that we no longer live in the homogeneous environment that was once the case. In fact, naturalistic worldview beliefs have come to dominate virtually all of the major institutions of modern American society. Beyond that, because of the high level of immigration into America by people who grew up in places dominated by other worldview beliefs, it is also not unusual to be around people who have a variety of other minority worldview beliefs, as well. America now more resembles the city of Athens as encountered by the Apostle Paul in Acts 17, than the traditional social landscape that America once had.

Navigating this faith divide can become confusing very quickly, simply because of the great numbers

of belief systems that are prominent in society these days. So, how are Christians to deal with this? We deal with it by understanding faith matters using a worldview paradigm.

**Paradigm Possibilities**

A paradigm is defined as a perspective, standard, or set of ideas – a way of looking at or evaluating something. So, when we want to evaluate what is going on in society, for instance, we have a perspective we use to do that evaluation. If we want to evaluate it from a different perspective, it is necessary to do it using a different set of ideas – we have to change paradigms. Thus, when a paradigm change occurs, a person has changed the very approach they use for evaluating what is going on.

***Traditional Paradigm***

In the life of most evangelical churches, there is a traditional paradigm that is used to make sense of how we think about programming discipleship training for the church. That traditional paradigm is based strictly on biblical doctrine. In other words, as we consider matters that relate to living out our Christian faith in the world, the standard approach is to go to the Bible and see what it says about that. So, in order to be effective in our effort to train believers to faithfully live out the Christian life in the world using this paradigm, we begin by using the basic principles of biblical interpretation to study the Bible and find the truths that speak to our area of interest.

When using the traditional paradigm, we never question whether or not it is true. We just assume that it is. Additionally, in order to validate our beliefs, we don't

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try to learn other paradigms and compare them to our beliefs. We simply accept that the Bible is true, and that it is the final word from God about how to live. Then we simply engage the study.

### **Worldview Paradigm**

When considering a Christian approach to discipleship training, a worldview paradigm has a different focus. It includes the traditional paradigm, as it does assume that the Bible is true and that it is the final word from God about how to live life. However, it is much broader in scope. While beginning with the assumption that the Bible is true, it also sees a need to understand worldview concepts, the beliefs of other worldview systems, and the principles involved in expressing our Christian faith across worldview barriers.

### **What Is Included in a Worldview Paradigm?**

As was mentioned above, a worldview paradigm includes knowledge of Christian doctrine, but it considers that doctrine within a larger context. The use of this larger context serves two purposes. First, it helps us understand the place of our own faith within the larger environment of faith possibilities. This gives us the ability to not only understand our Christian faith better, but also helps us see clearly how our faith compares to other faith possibilities. The second purpose it serves is to help us evaluate for Truth. By this evaluation, we can more easily understand why our Christian faith is true AND why other beliefs are not true. Hopefully you immediately see the value in this for Christian witness.

So if the worldview paradigm is broader in scope than the traditional paradigm for understanding our faith, what, exactly, does it include?

### **What Is Worldview and What Are the Worldview Possibilities?**

The purpose of this article is primarily to deal with the topic of discipleship, so we don't want to get into the technical aspects of worldview too deeply. However, in order to have the kind of broad perspective we need to address our main topic, it is helpful to have at least some understanding. As such, it is necessary to incorporate some knowledge about the meaning of worldview into the discipleship training process. So, what, precisely, is worldview?

To give a technical definition, people's worldview consists of the assumptions they make about the nature of reality. While this may, on the surface, seem a little academic, all we are really talking about here is the beliefs people hold that help them make a distinction in their own mind between what is real and what is fantasy. Everyone, without exception, holds these kinds of beliefs. Thus, everyone, without exception, evaluates their life experiences in ways that cause them to accept what they understand to be real and reject what they understand to be fantasy.

Virtually everyone makes these kinds of evaluations on a daily basis. However, not everyone evaluates things the same way. What you consider reality, many other people consider fantasy – and vice versa. When the vast majority of people in a society have the same understanding of reality, there is very little societal conflict. However, when large numbers of people within a society hold differing worldview beliefs, there WILL BE conflict. Notably, the social tensions we see going on right now in modern American society can be traced directly to worldview differences.

We can divide the worldview categories into four possibilities. Every religion, cult, and philosophy in existence is an expression of one of these. The four are:

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## Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

[info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)

Phone: 850-383-9756 (Tallahassee, Florida)

Fax: 850-514-4571

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1. Naturalism - Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe is all that exists, and it operates by universal natural laws.

2. Animism - Animism is the belief that there are many gods/spirits in the universe that interact with humans on earth in a symbiotic relationship.

3. Far Eastern Thought - Far Eastern Thought is the belief that ultimate reality is a transcendent, impersonal life force. The natural universe consists of pieces of the life force that have spun off of the main body and gotten far enough away that they have taken on a different character – material and personal. These pieces of the life force are working their way back to the main body through the process of reincarnation directed by karma.

4. Theism - Theism is the belief that a transcendent God exists who created the natural universe and has revealed himself and his ways to mankind.

There is one other category that is not technically a worldview, but does contain numerous belief systems. Hybrid belief systems are attempts to take essential worldview beliefs from more than one worldview system and combine them to create a new faith system. It should be understood, at this point, that EVERY hybrid belief system contains irreconcilable internal contradictions that cannot be overcome.

### ***What Are the Elements of Unity and Diversity That Make up a Biblical Worldview?***

With the above explanation, we can now dive more deeply into some of the key concepts that help us conceive of how to most effectively develop a discipleship program. One of those key concepts relates to unity and diversity.

Unity, as it relates to discipleship training, must be based on an under-

lying philosophy that explains the core faith of the church body. Thus, if a large percentage of a church body perceives a particular need, the work to fulfill that need will be unified based on some underlying set of beliefs.

There are actually numerous potential needs that a church could rally around, but not all of those pertain to matters that relate to the core essence of the Christian faith. It is absolutely possible for a church to create an identity based on ideas and activities that do not relate to the priorities of biblical Christianity. It is not that these non-essential things are necessarily bad, it is just that they are based on some agenda that is not a part of the core essentials of the faith. As such, even groups based on other faith systems could fulfill those needs.

And while churches certainly should involve themselves in many of these "non-essential" types of activities (helping the needy, for example), the purpose for doing them will be different from that of other groups. Everything the church does should be for the purpose of expressing the message of the gospel. Doing activities that don't have that as an ultimate goal does not fulfill the biblical mandate of the church, and it allows other agendas to hijack the church for other purposes. Building a solid Christian foundation begins with training the believers in the church regarding the essentials of a biblical worldview.

Saying that we need to train believers in the essentials of a biblical worldview also implies that there are "non-essentials." This is absolutely true. We will deal with those shortly, but let's start by first attempting to understand the essentials. So just what comprises the Christian faith's essential beliefs?

The "essentials" describe the line around the faith that cannot be violat-

ed. This line exists for every faith system in existence, and the one around the Christian faith defines the beliefs that must be believed by those who want to call themselves Christians. Believe something different about any one of the essentials and you have moved out of Christianity and into some other religious system.

It is important to note that while the essential beliefs of the Christian faith are, themselves, unique to Christianity, the questions we need to ask to get at these beliefs are the same questions we need to ask to get at the essential beliefs of every belief system in existence. These questions are:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality? (Who is God?)
2. What is a human being? (What is man?)
3. What is the ultimate a person can achieve in this life? (What is salvation?)

Every belief system in existence is able to answer these three questions, and the answers define the core essence of the belief system. Biblical faith answers them like this:

1. Ultimate reality is the God who is revealed in the Bible, who created the natural universe and mankind.
2. Human beings are persons created in the image of God, but fallen.
3. The ultimate a person can achieve in this life is to enter into an personal, eternal relationship with God by receiving Jesus Christ into their life.

Every legitimate Christian, regardless of church affiliation or any other factor, believes these things. Anyone who believes something different regarding any one of the three questions stands outside of the Christian faith. The biblical answers to these three questions constitute the beliefs that unify the faith.

But there are also elements of diversity. As we look at the variety that exists within the Christian community, with different denominations and different approaches to doing church, this becomes obvious very quickly. However, it is also important to recognize that all of this diversity relates to matters that are not essential to the faith. In other words, people can hold different views, even wrong views, about these non-essentials and still be a member of the body of Christ. These non-essential beliefs are associated with matters that are important, but not critical.

Some of the various non-essential beliefs include such things as:

- Beliefs about eschatology (last things)
- Beliefs about church ordinances (baptism and the Lord's supper)
- Beliefs about tongues
- Beliefs about church organizational structure
- Beliefs about worship style
- And there are many other beliefs, as well, that do not relate to the "essentials."

The body of Christ is, spiritually, a unified whole, and all true believers believe the same thing about the essentials of the faith. That said, there is a lot of diversity within the body of Christ that allows the work of God to be done in a whole host of different ways.

### **Why Using a Worldview Paradigm Is Important**

There is a lot of diversity within the Christian community – both on the church level and the individual level. And the diversity is important. It is the diversity that provides the opportunity for God to use individuals to reach out into every segment of society to make himself known.

But the diversity without the unity makes all of the individual efforts meaningless. Just doing a good deed does not, of itself, communicate the message of eternal life. For God's purpose to be fulfilled, the unifying message of the gospel needs to be solidified in the course of living out the diversity.

Because we live in such a pluralistic world where many have never even heard the gospel message, and many others do not understand it even if they have heard, Christians need to have the knowledge and skills to share the message of Christ across worldview barriers. This is where a worldview paradigm becomes important. This, first of all, means that we need to understand the message ourselves, then grasp how to

communicate that message to people who have an entirely different understanding of reality. It is a worldview paradigm that gives us this ability.

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