

Christian Worldview Development: Part II

Both Church and Mission need a solid Christian worldview that is thoroughly supernatural, that provides a complete cosmology, that answers the ultimate questions of life in God's way based on objective truth as revealed in Scripture. Unless we develop a true biblical worldview there is every likelihood that the unreached of the world will remain unreached. Worse, without it Christian faith may not survive.

by Hans M. Weerstra

In the last issue of the Journal, I addressed the urgent need of developing a Christian worldview. I attempted to define what worldview is and how it functions in culture including our own. I also listed the modern-day philosophies that make up our Western worldview. I called them the “currents of our times” since like strong winds that relentlessly blow on our lives they have the potential to destroy Christian faith and values at its roots. These currents have the power to rob us of biblical foundation for faith and life without which we cannot survive as the Church of Christ nor complete the task that remains. (See the discussion on Matthew 7:21-27 in my prior article, *IJFM* Volume 14:1, Jan.-March, 1997.)

In this article (Part II) we want to look at some additional philosophies of our Western (American) culture and what holds it together. We should be able to see that these modern thought systems are non-biblical, that they oppose Christian faith, and are true enemies of the Gospel. Furthermore, these modern philosophies of life are great barriers to the development of a biblical worldview. Understanding these philosophies is crucial since without it 1) we will not know what makes our Western world tick, nor, 2) will we understand how to effectively minister the Word of God to modern man, and worse, 3) we will not have a clue what is happening to Christian faith and life nor how to protect ourselves from its sinister effects bent on the destruction of our faith and life and mission as God's people in our generation.

There can be little doubt that our Lord would urge us, even command us, to develop a solid worldview, one based on God's Word and Spirit, one that would give us true answers to the ultimate questions of life. This means that we would get a biblical philosophy of life that is strong enough not only to resist the deadly effects of our secular culture but also is able to change our culture and world. Rather than be changed (contaminated) by secular humanism, as salt and light we need to change it for God's glory. Hence the Lord would strongly urge us to build deep-dug foundations that will withstand the modern-day “isms” of our culture that to some degree are all based on a philosophy of life that excludes God's truth. The Lord would warn us of these currents of our times that have pervaded our culture and have deeply changed our society, that undermine true faith since they have become part and parcel of our modern worldview.

We should realize that by means of our secularized worldview the enemy of our souls (of our life as Christians) sends its evil influence like poison gas as a silent killer into every aspect of our lives for the sole purpose of the destruction of faith and life. We must see that Satan can do that, and to a great degree has been successful, when he changes and uses worldview to his evil ends. He well knows that the worldview of our culture (of any culture) determines everything we believe, value, think and do. Satan knows that worldview effects the behavior of its people in

every area of their lives—not just in religion. Hence everything we think and do is ultimately controlled by our worldview which makes it paramount that the Church and Mission develop a solid biblical worldview.

In the prior article, we noted that the only way we can build biblical foundations for faith and life is by hearing and doing the Word of God, as taught by Jesus, as revealed in the Gospel, and as given to us in the Scriptures, i.e., especially in the Old Testament Scriptures. The obedience of faith is *the key dynamic* whereby we build those foundation, which is the same thing as saying that by means of God's Word and Spirit we develop a firm biblical worldview.

In this article we will look at three additional philosophies of life called existentialism, nihilism, and hedonism. Like the others we have studied, these are strong winds with great destructive potential to biblical faith. In a radical sense these modern philosophies of life undermine the deepest foundations of what Christianity is, what it stand for, and what it is meant to accomplish in the world.

Existentialism

According to Webster existentialism as a philosophy is "an introspective humanism." It is a philosophy that is subjective and introspective. Webster defines it as a "theory of man which expresses the individual's intense awareness of his contingency and freedom; a theory which states that the existence of the individual precedes his essence;

specifically a theory which stresses the individual's responsibilities for making himself what he is." There also is what is called "Christian existentialism," which Webster defines as "a theory which stresses the subjective aspects of the human person considered as a creature of God." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, sixth edition.)

A key element in this modern-day thought system is the fact that existentialism is "an introspective humanism." In my previous article we noted what humanism is, without which it is impossible to understand existentialism since the latter is an introspective version of the former. Humanism as a system of thought starts with mankind and by himself explains ultimate reality without additional assistance from outside of himself. Humanism is a way of seeing the world as centered upon distinctively human interests and ideals, but it does so at the expense of God and His revelation, done at the exclusion of the spiritual and supernatural, which are seen to be non-human concerns and interests. For the humanist, God and the supernatural (if such reality exists), pertain to non-human concerns, and therefore on that basis are excluded as valid concern, or are seen as impertinent and irrelevant.

Existentialism takes this one step further and holds that looking inside of oneself, or seeing reality subjectively as a human being, gives one clues as to who and what we are. According to existentialism, man's introspection of his own individual existence and experiences precedes and determines who and what he is. What one experiences subjectively and personally determines what is ultimately true, real and valid. As Webster stated, existentialism is "specifically a theory which stresses the individual's responsibilities for making himself what he is," or "that the existence of the individual (what man experiences) precedes his essence."

Although a true contradiction in terms, so called "Christian existential-

ism" stresses the subjective experiences Christians have, thus putting emphasis on "the subjective aspects of the human person considered as a creature of God." These subjective experiences are seen to validate and authenticate our lives as Christians and to a great degree determine the meaning and content of faith, i.e., making the subjective reality that we experience the foundations of faith. Like secular existentialism, so "Christian existentialism," holds that subjective experiences make us what and who we are and in a deep way determine our faith and beliefs, as well as the values that arise from them.

Even though "Christians existentialism" sounds good, especially to the uninitiated, it nevertheless is a dangerous enemy of the Gospel. The reason for this is that "Christian existentialism" is a subjective introspective version of humanism. The latter is a true enemy of Christian faith not because it stresses human concerns and ideals and experiences, which the Bible also stresses, but modern-day humanism sees the world as centered upon distinctively human ideals *at the expense and exclusion of God and the spiritual supernatural reality revealed in the Bible*. True humanism is a secular system of thought, including its introspective version of existentialism, sees the eternal and spiritual and supernatural as non-existent or irrelevant. A true humanist cannot take biblical spiritual reality seriously since they look (must look) at the world from within their humanistic perspective, i.e., looking at reality from "distinctively human interests and ideals."

What makes existentialism so appealing, although very dangerous, is that Christian faith and life is meant to be personal and experienced. In that sense Christianity is subjective and personal and truly fully human. For instance, no one who knows the Bible seriously would say that Christianity consists merely of giving intellectual

accent to a neat set of beliefs or doctrines, or simply agreeing with true teachings about God and the world. To the contrary, Christian faith is personal and is supposed to be lived and experienced; it needs to be appropriated on a personal level that involves all our human faculties. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength (Mark 12:30). Christianity is more than a system of thinking. It rather is a way of living that is fully human since it needs to personally appropriated and experienced in its fullness, which needs to happen on an on-going daily basis, in a loving relationship with our neighbors.

Having said that, we must see that our Christian experiences are totally different from existentialism. Christians faith and life, including our personal experiences, are radically different since they do not validate our faith nor determine its content. Christian existentialism would maintain that our human existence and the nature of our humanity is arrived at and formed by one's human subjective experiences, not by objective truth as revealed by God in Scripture. Christian existentialists would emphasize that our subjective experiences is what forms Christian faith, not because it is objectively true, nor because it is based on objective reality, but because we personally experience it. In modern existentialism, including so called Christian existentialism, things are true simply because one experiences truth, regardless of whether it is objectively true. For so called Christian existentialists, there is no outside objective truth, nor standard of truth, by which to evaluate it since no truth is possible or valid by which to evaluate it. There is no external objective standard that could be called upon to validate a given experience or feeling we or anyone has. In other words, whatever one feels and experiences is what is ultimately true and real.

Furthermore, faith for an existen-

tialist is something essentially irrational, something that has no reason, nor needs to be reasonable. In fact a reasonable explanation of faith may well ruin the reality that one has discovered and experienced. In a deep sense of the word, existential faith cannot be checked, nor verified, nor validated by any objective independent standard of truth because faith is a leap in the dark, that makes no real rational sense, that cannot be explained, that is often absurd, which from this perspective is seen as the deepest level of real faith. Because it is one's own subjective experience it cannot be validated by objective truth, including what is revealed in the Scriptures. Existentialism along with naturalism and humanism deny the miraculous and supernatural in religion. They reject objective revelation as a means of attaining truth. Hence it is a true enemy of biblical Christianity which is, and always has been, based on God's revealed objective will and truth.

In the existential world, the truth of something is validated and authenticated by what is subjectively and personally experienced. Its opposite is also true: Whatever is not personally experienced, i.e., anything independent of one's personal subjective experiences, is unimportant, is undermined, or worse, is seen as invalid and therefore is rejected as truth.

Existentialism undermines true truth, i.e., truth as it objectively exists, and therefore is pure subjectivism. As a modern day philosophy of life, existentialism is much like the Mormon experience of the "burning in the bosom" that authenticates the Mormon faith as a true simply because it is experienced.

It should be very apparent that existentialism plays hand in glove with the other currents of our times such as relativism and pluralism which hold that

everything is either relative (relativism) or everything is equally true (pluralism). Existential experiences are obviously relative and subjective, and none are ultimately true because none are ultimately wrong. All experiences as long as they are personal are true and equally valid even though all are also equally relative. As such existentialism is a great enemy of biblical Christianity, since it erodes the foundations of the objective revealed truth as God has given it and thus destroys true Christian faith and life on its deepest level, i.e., on Christian worldview level.

The modern-day secular systems of thought are true enemies of the Gospel, having a non-biblical view of reality, and as such have the potential to destroy Christian faith at its foundations.

Nihilism and Hedonism

Mankind without an objective truth and an objective standard of right and wrong is doomed to nihilism. This philosophy (worldview) holds that there is no such thing as objective truth, nor that there exists any grounds for it. This means that objective truth is non-existent and from this perspective is impossible to attain. In ethics it means that there is no objective standard for law, for right or wrong behavior, or for what the Bible calls righteousness.

Nihilism denies any and all objective grounds for moral principles or moral law. Since there is no standard of objective truth and accountability (as an objective absolute moral principle) life and living lose true meaning since nothing is either intrinsically right or wrong. In this system both right and wrong behavior are equally valid and good in the ultimate sense of the word.

Webster says that nihilism is "the doctrine that conditions in the social organizations are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake, independent of any constructive program; especially, the program or doctrine of the Russian party of the 19th and 20th centuries, who proposed various schemes of revolutionary reform and resorted to terrorism. In a loose usage, (it means) revolutionary propaganda; terrorism."

Hedonism like nihilism rest upon the secularized worldview that no objective truth and standard of ethics exists. Hedonism according to Webster is the

"doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts and dispositions." According to this perspective, one's life and way of life is centered on pleasure, on the pursuit of happiness, on the gratification of pleasure and its instincts. Since the underlying assumption is that there

is nothing else to life outside of one's own immediate existence, the biblical phrase fits the hedonist-materialist mentality to the tee: "Let us eat and drink (and be merry) for tomorrow we die." (See Is. 22:13 and 1 Cor. 15:32)

Modern day hedonism parallels Western materialism. Hedonism and materialism are logical extensions of each other that are based on the perspective of a closed universe, one closed to objective true reality, closed to the supernatural, that sees nothing else to life than this one consisting of this life and the present moment. Since modern man denies moral absolutes and objective reality outside of his own experience, since for him no "outside" absolutes exists, the logical conclusion is made: "Let's eat and drink and be merry. . . for tomorrow we die." In other words, why not gratify one's instincts and indulge in what gives one pleasure

now since there is nothing after or beyond this life.

There can be little doubt that our Western life of materialism, coupled with hedonism, based on existential humanism, fueled as it is by commercialism, is modern-man's deep seated philosophy of life, that more than anything else ensnares him. This philosophy as nothing else is what destroys modern man's soul (his life as a human being created in God's image). Like nothing else, this secular naturalistic worldview is leading, enticing, and enslaving modern man into a worldview that is bent on the total destruction of his life and soul.

(For a set of discussion questions on this all important issue, see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of this article.)

Operational Beliefs

In the previous article on worldview we noted the distinction concerning theoretical and operational beliefs. We discovered that people, Christians included, hold beliefs in one of two ways, either as 1) theoretically beliefs, that act much like creedal statement which do not greatly affect our values nor behavior, or as 2) operational beliefs that do influence what we value and think including how we act and behave.

Modern-day philosophies function in our lives in the same way. As basic belief systems people can hold these theoretically, which means that they will not greatly affect their behavior either negatively or positively. We may be aware of these systems, but if held theoretically, they will not operate in our lives. As such they pose little danger to our faith and life as Christians.

What is far worse, however, is when we hold our Christian beliefs as theoretical, like creedal statements, and confess to be Christian in various areas of life, but not truly live or operate in those beliefs consistently or deep enough. If we hold our Christian beliefs as theoretical, we could fool others and our-

selves, even appear to be good Christians, yet in our daily lives act as secular humanists much like the world around us. We may even deny (in theory) that we are secular humanists or modern-day existentialists, in fact we may be totally ignorant of these concepts, yet on an operational belief level, we may in fact live and behave much like modern-day secular humanists.

For that reason, it is paramount that we examine ourselves and determine what our deep seated beliefs really are. What beliefs do in fact operate in our lives that determine (to a large or small degree) our values, what we think and what we do (how we behave or conduct ourselves in our daily lives). To help us we should pray what the Psalmist prayed: "Search me Oh God and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24)

As God's people we need to operate in true biblical faith that is much more than theoretical beliefs. In other words, our beliefs need to be based on God's Word, which need to be deep enough so that it will influence our values and move us to right action and God glorifying conduct. What good are neat creedal statements, even true biblical ones, unless we live them consistently, deeply and daily to the glory of God?

What follows in this article are three concern that will help us develop a biblical worldview. First, we will look at the place and function of the inspired Scriptures. The apostle Paul said that the Scriptures are able to make us complete "thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:17). Obviously it is very important that the Scriptures have the fullest possible impact in our lives as human beings, especially as God's people in order to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Second, we will take a good look at how to properly study the Bible and

draw a critical distinction between systematic theology and biblical (historical) theology. Though most Christians may never have heard this before, we want to emphatically state that this is a very crucial concern to the pursuit of biblical faith and life, and absolutely essential to building firm foundations and developing a biblical worldview.

Third, we will conclude with a study on the "mysteries of the kingdom" also called the "mysteries of the Gospel" or the "mysteries of God." We want to conclude with this important subject since Christian worldview development cannot happen without it. The mysteries of God, or the mysteries of the Gospel, need to be revealed and disclosed to us if we are to develop a biblical worldview.

All Scripture

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness (justice), that the man of God may be complete (fitted), thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Nowhere is the revelation of God and the purpose and meaning of the created order, including the origin and purpose of mankind, more clearly disclosed than in the Scriptures. As most of us know, God's Word consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible is called the Word of God because God by the Holy Spirit is the principal author of all Scripture. What we find written in the Scriptures originated in the mind of God Himself, and for that reason is called the Word of God. The Scriptures are inspired or "God-breathed" and as such give us life—the life of God the Creator as well as the life of Jesus Christ. In the same way that Adam became a living soul when God breathed into him the breath of life so in the same way we receive the life of God through the

"God-breathed" Word of God. (See Deuteronomy 4:1, 8:1-3, 30:15 and 30:19, 20; also Proverbs 11:19 and 12:28 and Matthew 4:4 and John 5:39-40, 10:10; and 20:30, 31)

To say that "all Scripture" is "God-breathed," implies that the Scriptures are closely linked to the breath of God which denotes at least two things: First, the Scriptures come from God, specifically from the Holy Spirit, who in the original languages is seen as "the Breath or Wind of God" and the "Breath or Wind of Christ." Second, the Bible gives life to those who listen to it, it revives those who believe what it says who act on what it reveals. For this reason the apostle Paul is able to say with full conviction that the Bible is so profitable, i.e., able to teach and correct, able to make men and women mature and complete (fitted), able to instruct in righteousness so that we become "thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The inspired Scriptures are designed to be the source of our faith and life as God's people. This is true especially concerning the area of worldview. The Scriptures are designed to give us true, trustworthy and reliable answers to the ultimate questions of life. They give us the building blocks for faith and life and so help us develop a worldview that is fully in line with the objective truth as God has revealed it. Furthermore, because the Bible is inspired (God-breathed, Latin *spirare*) we can say with full confidence that there is no greater more authoritative book than the Bible and that without it there is no way to develop firm foundation for life. No book or source outside of the Bible exists that could give us a true and reliable (as well as satisfying) worldview regarding the ultimate reality of the universe and its purpose. God has chosen to authenticate the Bible by itself, i.e., by its

own witness about itself, since no greater witness exists that could authenticate the Bible.

In view of the fact that the primary author of Scripture is God Himself, who personally stands behind it, validating and confirming and even swearing to its every truth and promise, we can take full confidence in what it reveals. This is not only true with reference to so called religious, moral and spiritual (supernatural) reality, but applies to

To some degree all Christians stand in need to develop a biblical worldview. This is most urgent in our day since Christian beliefs and values concerning biblical truth and ultimate reality are under relentless attack.

all truth the Bible addresses in its pages, including the origin of the universe, the purpose of mankind, the meaning and purpose of history, including man's problem, the existence of evil, and God's provision to deliver man from sin and evil.

We might ask, Who in the final analysis becomes "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"? Scripture is clear: It happens to those who like the wise man hears God's Words, and hears them deeply so that he acts on them and puts them into practice. It happens to those who accept and believe what God reveals, who then act on it in the "obedience of faith."

Notice that this is not blind faith that just believes because one has to believe. Rather it is the kind of faith that sees God's Word as reasonable, that understands what He has said in its proper context and background, and always sees Scripture in light of who God is and what He has said about Him-

self in terms of the ultimate questions of life and reality. In other words, biblical faith is a reasonable (truly rational) endeavor that involves our intellect and will, (our mind) as well as our heart and emotions. Therefore, Christians must be careful not lay aside their intellect or mind, nor undermine any other of their God given faculties. Christians must not commit mental suicide to believe. Just the opposite is true: We cannot have biblical faith without using our minds

and intellect, as well as all our other God given faculties, to its full potential. Biblical faith is not an irrational absurd leap in the dark as so called Christian existentialism would have us believe.

In this light note what the Bible says about itself in 2 Peter 1:19-21 and Psalm 119:89. Also carefully note 1 Thess. 2:13, Gal. 1:11,12 and John 10:35. This last verse is very significant because

in this passage Jesus confirmed the fact that Scripture comes from God, calling the Scriptures the Word of God.

We also need to note one additional concern raised in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. When Paul talked about "all Scripture..." he does not mean the New Testament Scripture. Unfortunately this is a great surprise to most Evangelical Christians who do not, maybe cannot, see this. They would say: "Sure all Scripture. . . especially the New Testament." But this was not what Paul had in mind when he originally penned these awesome words, nor was this the message the original readers heard. Originally "all Scripture" meant *all of the Old Testament*. This was the original meaning since the New Testament had not been written yet when Paul penned these words. In fact 1 and 2 Timothy is in process of becoming part of the New Testament. One thing is sure, Paul did not refer to his own writing in 2 Timothy as being part of "all Scripture" even

though there is good reason for us today to include it as part of the Scriptures. However, Paul primarily was talking about all of the Old Testament Scriptures, which he said was God-breathed, which because of its divine inspiration was (and today is) profitable to teach and correct and train people in goodness and righteousness, making them complete men and women and thus become equipped for every good work.

Perhaps to many Christian today this seems odd and even questionable. Most Christians, (Evangelical Christians) are essentially New Testament Christians who want to have New Testament faith, be like New Testament believers, and belong to a New Testament church, etc. From that vantage point it is hard to see the great profitability of the Old Testament, what it is, what it does, what it can change us to be, namely, making us “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Due to this limited (New Testament) perspective we have tried to be good Christians without the proper foundations of “all Scripture” as given in the Old Testament. In fact as the truth of “all Scripture” is discovered and receives its full impact in our lives, we will come to see that it is impossible to understand the New Testament, in any adequate sense of the word, without a prior understanding of the Old Testament. This insight leads us into an even more radical discovery: What the Old Testament reveals in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is in fact the basis for the rest of Genesis, which forms the basis for the entire Old Testament. Properly understood then, the first eleven chapters of Genesis form the bedrock foundation for the whole Bible including the New Testament, since the New Testament rest upon the foundation as revealed in the Old Testament.

At this point it is worth our while to hear what the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer said about this crucial all important matter:

The battle for a Christian understanding of the world is being waged on several fronts. Not the least of these is biblical study in general and especially the question of how the opening chapters of the Bible are to be read. Modern writers commenting on the book of Genesis tend to treat the first eleven chapters as something other than history. For some, this material is simply a Jewish myth, having no more historical validity for modern man than the Epic of Gilgamesh or the stories of Zeus. For others, it forms a prescientific vision that no one who respects the results of scholarship can accept. Still others find the story symbolic but no more. Some accept the early chapters of Genesis as revelation in regard to an upper-story religious truth, but allow any sense of truth in regard to history and cosmos (science) to be lost.

How should these early chapters of Genesis be read? Are they historical and if so, what value does their historicity have? In dealing with these questions, I wish to point out the tremendous value Genesis 1-11 has for modern man. In some ways these chapters are the most important ones in the Bible, for they put man in his cosmic setting and show him his peculiar uniqueness. They explain man's wonder and yet his flaw. Without a proper understanding of these chapters we have no answer to the problem of metaphysics, morals or epistemology, and furthermore the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story 'religious' answer.” (From preface of Volume 2 “A Christian View of the Bible as Truth: Genesis in Space and Time” by Francis Schaeffer from *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, A Christian Worldview*.)

Because this quote is so far reaching with so many deep implications we need to understand what Dr. Schaeffer said: First, he wants to stress the “tremendous value Genesis 1-11 has for modern man.” He says that in some way these first chapters of the Bible are the most important because they give man his proper setting, they tell him who he is, they tell him his great value (uniqueness) as well reveal his problem (flaw). Without this fundamental setting no one can properly (biblically speaking) believe. Furthermore, we cannot obtain any real answers “to meta-

physics, morals or epistemology.” This simply means that the answers to the ultimate questions of life, including how we know what we know, including correcting the modern-day thought systems, are impossible endeavors. Hence Schaeffer reminds us to see the great importance of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, that we need to see them as historical revelation, not as another myth or legend, not as a “prescientific vision,” nor as something that has lost “a sense of truth in regard to history and the cosmos (science).”

Schaeffer correctly tells us that no real answers to problems concerning “morals or epistemology” is possible without a deep understanding of the original revelation given in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. He would maintain that any morals or ethical behavior without a righteous just and ultimate law and Law Giver is impossible. Also, any meaningful and reasonable “epistemology” is impossible without Genesis 1-11, which means that the method and grounds of knowing, including what is actually known, i.e., the knowledge we have, is impossible to obtain or verify. Epistemology asks how do we know what we know, and how valid and true is what we know, and what is the source and limitations if any of the knowledge we have. Genesis 1-11 gives true, reasonable and reliable answers to these ultimate questions. Without God's revelation given in the first chapters of Genesis no true reliable knowledge of ultimate reality, including the visible and invisible existence, (empirical and non-empirical reality) is possible. One cannot attain the deep answers concerning life, its origin, meaning and purpose without this fundamental basic reality as God has given it in Genesis 1-11.

Secondly, we need to understand what Schaeffer meant by “upper-story religious truth,” as “one more upper-story religious answer.” So called “upper-story reality” is part and parcel of the fab-

ric of modern-day culture and Western secular humanistic existentialism. As a matter of fact, it is the warp and woof of modern-day life, including much of modern Christian faith and life. We need to come to see that “upper-story” truth deeply undermines Christian biblical faith and if not corrected will ultimately destroy it.

Therefore, so called “upper-story truth” including upper-story personal experiences, are based on a wrong understanding of Paul’s phrase “all Scripture.” People who believe in “upper-story truth” hold to a believe that Scripture is not really inspired in all it speaks about. For them “all Scripture” is reinterpreted to apply only to those parts of Scripture which speak of religious “upper-story truth.” These people do not hold to a full view of Scripture. For them the Bible does not speak truth about everything it speaks about. Such people, including Christians, believe and say that Scripture is inspired only in areas where it speaks about religious and spiritual and personal matters. From this perspective, the Scriptures do not speak with inspired truth about history, about the universe, about its origin and purpose, about biology and most other scientific matters since these are not religious “upper story” concerns. They would hold that the “all Scripture” only speaks with inspiration and truth about religious matters, as well as personal spiritual experiences. In this sense not “all Scripture” is inspired because the Scripture do not intend to speak infallibly and truthfully about scientific historical issues. Its only purpose is to speak about faith and religious (non-scientific) matters. From this vantage point, only when the Bible speaks in the religious spiritual area of life is it inspired by God.

What we are left with, according to this view, is a Bible either full of errors

in matters pertaining to scientific and historical matters, or simply the Bible’s revelation concerning such matters is irrelevant. From this view point we can and should discard the parts of the Bible that deal with science, history, and observable empirical reality. Schaeffer would call the latter “lower-story” or “bottom-story reality,” i.e., that which deals with history, with objective empirical reality, like matters concerning the universe, its origin and all that we see and touch, in its form as we know it. Lower story reality is the rightful domain of scientific observation and study, but not the proper concern of the Bible.

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What are the implication of this position? If in fact the Bible’s message concerning lower story truth is not true, or is impertinent, then indeed all we are left with is religious spiritual matters of truth and reality. This means that “the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story religious answer,” which would imply that it really has no true basis in history, that ultimately the Christian faith has no basis in historic reality, nor has proof of verification, which means that Christian faith is relegated to another personal and relative “existential experience” or is simply relegated to another mythology.

It should be clear that the ground for “upper-story religious truth” lies in modern-day existentialism, or so called Christian existentialism, both of which are enemies of the Gospel since both undermine objective truth. They are enemies of the objective revealed truth of “all Scripture” since it relegates to myth or legend any all

historic time-space reality, including everything that happened in so called “pre-recorded history” i.e., the history that is revealed in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. This implies that all pre-Abrahamic revelation must be regarded either as myth or legend or allegory. Genesis 1-11 deals with non-historic reality or with religious truth and therefore needs to be interpreted in an allegorical way in terms of spiritual or religious reality. What we are left with in this perspective is a Bible that has lost its historical foundations and any basis of verification. It only deals with upper story level truth, that is personal and relative, that is religious (non-scientific) much of it, or all of it, being non-historical.

Because to some degree we have done this with the Bible we have lost the basis of true biblical faith. This is especially true with regard to the first eleven chapters of the Genesis without which it is impossible to develop a faith that is truly and wholly biblical. Without true faith it is impossible to please God, without which we cannot become whole men and women, without which we cannot be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (See Hebrews 11:1-7 and 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.)

We therefore conclude that all of Scripture is inspired (God-breathed by the Holy Spirit who is the Breath of God), including God’s revelation in Genesis 1-11, including all truth revealed in Scripture concerning bottom-story historic reality—that is objectively true and real. Although the Bible does not speak exhaustively about bottom-story historical reality, yet what the Bible does reveal about this is fully true.

For instance, although Genesis 1 does not speak in exhaustive detail on how God made the sun, the moon, and the stars, which as we know includes our solar system and the Milky Way, with thousands and perhaps even millions

Biblical Worldview Development

of other galaxies of the universe, nevertheless, what Genesis 1 says concerning the creation of the sun, moon and stars, although not exhaustive truth, nevertheless is true in the fullest sense of the word, because it was revealed by God by inspiration and therefore is truly profitable for teaching and correction, able to make us complete, able to give us proper foundations for faith and life which can equip us for "every good work."

Systematic vs. Biblical Theology

Most of us are well aware of the fact that there are lots of theologies out there, both good and bad. There is Evangelical theology, Catholic theology, Greek Orthodox theology; there is Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist theology; there is Liberal and Modern theology. There are traditional and contemporary theologies. We could also know that there is systematic as well as biblical theology. As we study the Scriptures we should ask, what theological reference should we follow? It is true that one's theology does effect what we see and how we interpret Scripture. Our premise is as follows: If we want to study the Bible correctly in God's way, and receive the full measure and impact of revealed truth, we need to understand the difference between systematic theology and biblical theology. Then we need to proceed to study the Scriptures from the reference point of the latter, of Biblical Theology.

Although defining these two types could take an entire article (see article by Dr. Daniel Fuller on "Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith" in this issue) here we will need to settle for the brief version.

Essentially systematic theology follows a thematic study of God's Word, explaining in a logical (systematic) way what the various themes and subjects (doctrines) of Scripture are, what they mean and how they relate and how they apply to our lives. Systematic theol-

ogy is an in-depth study of the various themes of the Bible usually studied from one's own church or denominational perspective, (what Dr. Fuller called "the analogy of faith") and then organizing them into a logical whole. If it is good systematic theology, it will try to say what the Bible intends to say about the various themes (doctrines) of Scripture. When all the different doctrines have been studied, the author puts them into a book, (usually a very thick one) consisting of several volumes, and it is called systematic or dogmatic theology.

Biblical theology, in comparison to systematic theology, studies the Bible in its own context, in its own historic setting. It will draw out of a given passage of Scripture what it says and intends to say to its original hearers, in the historic setting and context of the original authors and hearers. It will therefore focus on what the original authors wanted to communicate to the people it was originally addressed to. It stays away from putting meaning or interpretation into the text, that may be true for us in our context, but that was not originally there in the first place.

Unlike systematic theology, the hallmark of biblical theology is that the chronology or the historical sequence and development of the Bible receives its due impact. Biblical theology studies the Bible chronologically, rather than by themes or doctrines as does systematic theology. So the chronological context and historical development of the Bible receives its full significance in biblical theology.

Allowing the text of Scripture to say what it says in its own context, or drawing out of Scripture what it says is not necessarily easy, but it must be done. Drawing out of the Bible to say what it says is called exegesis. The "ex" is a Greek suffix which means "out of," while the "egesis" comes from the Greek verb that means to "guide." So a good exegete of Scripture is one skilled to take

(guide) out of Scripture what it says, what it intended to say to its original hearers and what it meant for the original authors.

Eisegesis is the opposite of exegesis. The Greek suffix "eis" means "into" or to "put into". One who does eisegesis, (instead of exegesis) is one skilled in putting meaning and interpretations into the text of Scripture that is not there in the first place, that is not in line with the original meaning and purpose of the biblical passage. It is putting more meaning, sometimes wrong meaning, usually one's own meaning, into the text of Scripture that one cannot be found in the original text itself.

We may think a given text or passage says one thing, or proves a given point, but because most of us are not skilled exegetes of Scripture, nor know how to do it, we fall into the trap of putting meaning into the text that is not there in the original passage. Frequently, it may not even be in accord with the plain meaning and intent of our own translations and versions of the Bible.

When Jesus said "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) what did He mean to say? What was Jesus' original intention when He spoke these words? When we have determined what Jesus meant to say, in the historical context that He said it, including what He intended His original hearers to hear, then we come closest to the objective truth of God's Word about this part of His revelation. Then based on what it originally meant in its own context we have laid the proper ground work and are now prepared to come to the understanding what God's revelation means for us today in our historic setting. But it must happen in that order: Biblical theological exegesis must be first, then the interpretation and application of it to our own lives in our setting.

To some degree we are all biased. Due to our particular backgrounds

that inevitably color our perception we see things, including the Bible, from our own personal and subjective perspectives. It is like putting on a set of colored glasses that gives a certain tint to everything we see, that also effects what we do and/or not do. To the extent possible, we need to take those colored glasses off, and look at Scripture as objectively as we can, always allowing the text of Scripture to speak for itself, to say what it says and intends to say. Good biblical theology helps us take off our subjective biases since it always seeks to do sound exegesis which is at least one step removed from our own subjective pursuits and what this personally means. Biblical theology seeks to determine the meaning of the text of Scripture in its own context before seeking to interpret and apply it to one's own faith and life and times.

Timeless Categories

A main hallmark of biblical theology is that it seeks to discover the integrating theme of the Bible as it historically unfolds from generation to generation. One of the pitfalls of systematic theology is to study the Word of God in timeless categories. This means that we study the various themes of Scripture out of their time sequence or pay little regard to the historical development of Scripture. When we do that we lose a great deal of the full impact of God's revelation. Without it, we may never find God's purpose for our lives and for our generation. Truly we run the risk of missing the purpose and meaning of our lives in our *kaïros* moment. If we do not understand what God's purpose and plan was for His people in former generations, and how His purpose and plan have developed through history it is virtually impossible to see it for our own.

What is worse is that we can easily fall into the trap of studying the Bible with a non-biblical grid, approaching the Scripture with a Greek dualistic (Platonic) paradigm. Greek dualism divides reality into two spheres: the material on the one hand and the non-material on the other. It sees that evil and sin reside in the material, (in matter, including the human body, including time-space historical reality) while the good resides in the spiritual (in the non-material part of existence, including the whole world of ideals and all non-empirical reality). Much of systematic

When we know the objective reality of God's Word, we are then prepared to come to a true understanding what God's revelation means for us today in our historic time-space setting.

theology has been influenced by Greek dualism since it studied Scripture by themes, with little or no regard for its time historic categories. The result has been that much of systematic theology has as its basis a non-biblical worldview, i.e., one resting in Greek philosophy rather than in biblical truth in line with a biblical world and life view of reality.

(For a set of discussion questions on the place and role of the Scriptures and Biblical Theology see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of the article.)

Mysteries of the Kingdom

"Then the disciples came and said to Him (Jesus), Why do you speak to them (crowds) in parables? And He said to them, (disciples) because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to

them (the crowds) it has not been given. For to him who has more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them (the crowds) in parables because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matthew 13:10-13)

There are mysteries in the Bible, sometimes translated "secrets" in our English versions. Scriptures speak of the "mysteries of the Kingdom." and "the mysteries of the Gospel" as well as the "mysteries of God" and even "the mysteries of Christ" etc. (See Matt. 13, Eph. 1:9; 3:9; 6:19, and Col. 4:3)

A discussion on the mysteries of the Kingdom at the end of this article is included since it will help us realize two things: 1) Help us identify key aspects of worldview, one of them being the Kingdom of God, i.e., God's rule and control over life including mankind, and 2) Show us how from God's perspective we can know the mysteries, how God reveals the mysteries, under what conditions and to whom it is disclosed. Without knowing the mysteries of the Gospel it is impossible to obtain a biblical Christian worldview.

What then does the Bible mean when it speaks about the "mysteries of the Kingdom" or the "mysteries of the Gospel"? Upon a close study of this concept it is best not to translate it "secrets." The word "secrets" denotes something that is kept hidden from others, which is revealed to a few, or never revealed to anyone. However, that is not the idea of the "mysteries of the Kingdom" nor the "mysteries of the Gospel." God wants to truly disclose the full measure of His Word and revelation to all. So in this sense in God's Word there never are any real true secrets. The "mysteries" in the Bible never refers to some revelation, that needs to be kept

Biblical Worldview Development

hidden, something that can only be revealed to the initiated of a club or members of a select group.

The basic idea of the biblical "mysteries" refers to things that God has not yet disclosed to people. They are the undisclosed truths of the Word of God, or the unrevealed message that God has not yet made known to some people. The question is who are these people, and why has God's Word not been revealed to them? Also we might ask, Why has it been revealed to some and not to others?

The Gentiles

One answer is as follows: God has not revealed His Word nor the Gospel of salvation to the peoples of the world, whom the Bible calls "the Gentiles" or "the nations" of the earth, because they have not heard it. Why haven't they heard? The Gentile nations have not heard the Gospel since the Lord's laborers (missionaries) have not as yet gone to them. For the Gentiles the Gospel and the Kingdom of God is a mystery. (See Romans 10:13, 14 and 15 for this process.) It has not been disclosed to them, i.e., the Gospel has not been revealed to them, because no one has been sent to communicate it to them. For the Gentiles (nations) the Gospel and God's revelation in the Bible is a mystery. It will remain such until someone goes and tells them the Gospel and teaches them God's Word. In Ephesians Paul sees the mystery of God revealed to the Gentiles in this way. When the Gospel has been revealed to them, when God's purpose and plan of redemption in Christ is accomplished among them the mysteries of the Kingdom cease to be mysteries. (See Eph. 3:8-12 and 6:19, 20)

Heart Condition

There is a more subtle meaning of the "mysteries." According to the Matthew 13 passage our Lord did not reveal the mysteries to most of the people who heard him. He spoke to the

crowds in parables, and did so on purpose. The text leaves little doubt that the Lord spoke to the crowds in parables so that (for the purpose that, not just as a result of) hearing they would not hear nor understand.

The Lord's intent was not to disclose the mysteries of the Kingdom to the crowds and multitudes. The mysteries were only revealed to His disciples. But we ask, Why not to the crowds and multitudes? And why only to the disciples? The answer lies in the variant conditions of their hearts. The Lord knew the hardness of the hearts of the crowds and therefore spoke to them only in parables. He did this on purpose, "so that hearing they would not hear," "so that seeing they would not see," saying later on "lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back and be healed" (See Matt. 13:14, 15)

Why, we ask, would the Lord not want to reveal to the crowds the mystery of the Kingdom? The answer must lie in the following: If the Lord had in fact revealed the mysteries, or disclosed the meaning of the parables to the crowds, knowing full well that they would not believe, knowing that they would not act on what they heard, it would have increased their condemnation. Since He did not come to condemn but to save He did not reveal the mysteries of the parables to the crowds. It was really the loving thing to do. For that reason Jesus only spoke to crowds in parables. All they heard was interesting stories.

In contrast, the Lord knew the heart condition of His disciples. He knew that their hearts were towards Him, open to the things of God, willing to know God and learn of Him and to put into practice what He would reveal to them. He knew that they would believe what He revealed, that they would take it serious enough to act on it.

As we have seen before, the Bible calls this the "obedience of faith" or the "obedience that comes from faith"

(see Romans 1:5, Romans 16:26, and Acts 6:7), which is what justifies people then and now. Works, even good works, done in His name, do not justify anyone. Only faith in God and His Word does. But it must be serious faith, deep faith in God's character, including the trustworthiness of His Word, which must eventuate in corresponding changes in behavior, the kind of faith that produces obedience to God and His Word. That is the faith that saves and gives us life. This is the faith that will save the world!

Today as then the Lord wants to reveal to us the deep things of His Kingdom and Gospel. But He will only do this if we have "ears to hear" and "eyes to see." He will only reveal it to those who want to understand, who are willing to believe, whose faith results in obedience. In other words, God will only reveal His Word to those who want more of Him, whose hearts are not hardened, who want to know His purpose and plan for the world, who are willing to line up their lives with it.

(For a set of questions on the "mysteries of the Kingdom" see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of the article.)

By Reason of Use

In the prior article we started with the parable of the wise and foolish man. Both heard the words of the Lord, both had access to the Word, and both belonged to the household of faith. Yet only the wise man, who had wisdom, survived. We find a very helpful insight into having wisdom and being wise in Hebrews 5:12-14. It says: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of

use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

There are many Christians who should be teachers of others but are not able. Many Christians seem to be perpetual babes that do not grow up, nor seemingly can. They need baby food and cannot digest solid food. They are unskilled in the word of righteousness because they are babes and they seem to remain in that state.

Why is it that some Christians cannot grow up while others do? Hebrews 5 gives us the answer: "Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The author of Hebrews is saying that Christians become strong and of full age, i.e., they become mature in the faith able to teach others, "by reason of use" i.e., by actually doing the Word of God, or by obedience do what is right. By such use they exercise their senses, or they get wisdom and understanding, which gives them the ability to discern what is good and what is evil.

Here is the key: If we never obey the Word of God, or if we never really use it in our lives, we will remain perpetual babes, always needing milk instead of solid food. In this state Christians will never grow up nor ever get the wisdom needed to discern what is good from what is evil. Proverbs 2:10-12 is to the point: "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil. . . ." Verse 20 adds, "So you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness."

Therefore, genuine faith in God's Word is primary. This results in obedience to the Word of God, what Hebrews 5 calls "by reason of use," which results in maturity, becoming "of full age," strong in the Lord, which produces wisdom in us that gives us the abil-

ity to "discern both good and evil." This is God's design and will for our lives as His people. By the obedience of faith we will receive the wisdom of God and become of "full age." We will become mature and strong. What Paul said will and can happen: We will be "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." So may it be!

Discussion Questions Related to Existentialism, Nihilism and Hedonism:

1. How is existentialism and modern-day humanism related?
2. Is there something appealing to existentialism, especially to so called Christian existentialism? What might that be?
3. What is essentially wrong with existentialism as compared to Christianity, especially as compared to the biblical Christian faith and the Word of God and the objective truth revealed in the Word of God?
4. For biblical Christian life, what authenticates or validates, and even determines, whether something is true or not true? Even though Christians do have subjective feeling and personal experiences do these make it true simply because they are experienced? Or is it something else, something objective to personal introspection, something external to our subjective feelings that determines whether or not something is true and is truth?
5. How does existentialism play hand in glove to modern-day relativism and pluralism?
6. Do you clearly see that existentialism as an "introspective humanism" is a very serious enemy of the Christian faith? Have you personally been affected by it? To what degree? How can you, or any Christian, come clean of this modern day stronghold in our hearts and in our worldview?
7. Do you see that faith as defined in existentialism is irrational, that it truly is a leap in the dark? Can you explain

how and why existentialism defines faith in this way?

8. Can you see that the Christian faith is rational, i.e., that it is reasonable, that it is not an irrational leap in the dark? Can you see that? What do you think Christian faith is?
9. What makes nihilism as a worldview so devastating? From a nihilistic perspective explain why acts of terrorism can be justified as perfectly valid, necessary and good?
10. In a nihilistic-hedonistic world why would it make perfect sense to eat, live and be happy for tomorrow we die? Would you live for number one, for yourself, as a nihilist? Would you be a hedonist? Why not be a hedonist, or a modified hedonist, maybe a Christian hedonist?
11. Are you in agreement with the statement that what makes our Western world tick is materialism coupled with hedonism, based as it is on existentialism, which is fostered by commercialism? Do you see this is modern-man's main philosophy of life? Would you say that this as nothing else is what destroys modern man's soul and life and is leading him (enticing him) into ultimate destruction?
12. As an assignment, look up in a good dictionary what is meant by determinism and fatalism. Then interact with the definition. Ask yourself how determinism (fatalism) relates to Christianity as a system of life, especially to the biblical position concerning human freedom. According to the Bible, are we essentially free in our actions and decisions, in our life as human beings, or are things predetermined by necessity by God or by fate/chance or karma and therefore life is basically fatalistic? Make sure you save your answer and compare it after your study on "free acts" in lesson two, and lesson four coming up in the course.
13. How does your dictionary define

Biblical Worldview Development

deism? Is this an essential Christian position? Is it a viable biblical position? If not, why not? What is basically wrong with a deistic worldview?

Discussion Questions on the Inspired Scriptures and Biblical Theology:

1. Why do Christians call the Bible the Word of God? What makes it the Word of God?
2. What do some of the above passages in Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Matthew and John teach? Please study some of these great passages concerning the Bible's own witness about itself.
3. Why do we need life from God? Don't we have life already? Isn't the life we have enough? Will the life we now have just keep on going by itself, including after we die? Do you know what the Bible says about these important questions of ultimate reality?
4. What do you think it means that the Scriptures are inspired by God? What does that tell us about the Scriptures and what does that mean for us who read and study the Scriptures, who have access to the Scriptures?
5. What does it mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? If it is inspired is it trustworthy? Why is that?
6. Why should we believe what the Scriptures say about the origin of the universe and life and humanity as being created by God? Is it trustworthy in this area? Can we trust it to be true in giving us historical facts that occurred 2,000 years ago, or 3,000 or 6,000 or more years ago?
7. How can we get to see the big picture of the whole Bible without knowing every every chapter and every verse of every book, without knowing every detail of the Bible? Is this possible? How is it possible?
8. What does 2 Peter 1:19-21 say about the Bible or about prophecy of Scripture? What does this mean for you personally? Please explain.
9. What is the main difference between systematic theology and biblical-historical theology?
10. What are the main hallmarks of biblical theology? What are some pitfalls of systematic theology?
11. How can we see and understand the purpose for our generation today?
12. If we study the Bible chronologically, beginning in Genesis and then see what develops over time, closely observing what God does and says from generation to generation, all the way through the book of Revelation, what would you discover? What do you think is the central integrating theme of the whole Bible? Can you explain what it is or what it would be?

Discussion Questions on the Mysteries of the Kingdom:

1. What should we understand with the biblical idea of the "mysteries of the Kingdom" or the "mysteries of the Gospel"? Are they deep secrets that only a few are will know, that no one is really supposed to know?
2. Why does God reveal His Word and purpose to some and not to others? Apply that to your own heart and life?
3. What makes some Christians

strong Christians, able to stand and survive the trials of life, while others buckle under? Some can survive the winds and currents while others are destroyed? Does this have anything to do with the mysteries of the Kingdom? Does it have anything to do with developing a Christian biblical worldview? Explain.

4. What have you learned about building firm foundations for your life as a Christian? How does this compare to developing a strong biblical worldview?
5. For your personal reference, list the most important concepts (key concepts) that you have learned in this first lesson. Also list the ways you plan to apply them to your life. Remember, it is one thing to hold beliefs theoretically, but quite another to hold them as operational. Ask yourself, how can I make the new insights and the new beliefs operational in my life? How do they, how can they become operational in the lives of believers?
6. Do you think other Christians should learn these key concepts? Can you help them teach them so they can also learn them? How would you go about that?

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