

## Tough Question Week 18 – What is a Worldview? Part 1

Hey there, this is Tim Perry, coming at you with now Week 18 of Tough Questions.

Well, ordinarily we're doing our reading in scripture and encountering stuff that raises questions for us. It's kind of like we're the ones asking the Bible tough questions about what the Bible is claiming – what it's saying.

Well, this week – we're going to flip that around, and I'm going to ask you a tough question. And my tough question this week is: "What is your worldview?" How do you see the world? Do you pay very much attention even to how you think about the world and the way things are?

We're going to take a minute to define the concept of worldview, and I want you to think about your worldview in the process. I want you to also think about other people's worldviews and how they could be different and how your conversations with people about what you believe and about what they believe are affected by this idea that we call worldview. Every time we interact with other people – every time we read the Bible, it could be that what we most need to understand is how different our worldview is from the worldview being thought about or presented by another person or the worldview being presented by scripture.

So I thought right here in Week 18, let's take the opportunity to define what a worldview is and let that be a part of how we go about doing tough questions for the rest of the year.

So here we go – worldview. How would you describe or define worldview? One way to think of a worldview is like a pair of glasses. Those glasses may be very fashionable and cool, they may be like this kid here – kind of awkward and weird looking, but think of what glasses do. They sit on our face, we don't notice them after a while – yet they help us see everything. They help us focus everything – either blocking out sun if we have to wear sunglasses or if we have a pretty strong prescription in our glasses – we absolutely have to have those things on to see anything. So one way to think of it is like a pair of spectacles – everything passes through them and affects what we see.

If I ask people – what is your worldview? – people might think of these kinds of things. They might think – "Well, it's just my way of seeing life – it's my philosophy of life." Some people might answer, "Well, my worldview is my religion because that shapes how I form my opinion spiritually about the world around me."

Some people aren't even aware that they have a worldview. They may even adamantly say, "I don't have a worldview. Get away from me – stop asking me about a philosophy of life!" This is kind of a defense mechanism against thinking about how we think. Some people just simply would say, "Well, that must be in the category of beliefs and opinions about everything around me – the way that I react to the stuff that I read in the newspaper." At bottom, a worldview is the thing that

you don't think that much about but affects everything else that you hold opinions about – that's what a worldview is.

You could think of a worldview also in terms of a dominant story line. Christians like to talk about the meta-narrative of scripture as being the story that affects how they see all other stories or all other reality. A writer by the name of Brian Godaway puts it this way: "Every religion and philosophy ultimately encompasses a worldview, a comprehensive web of beliefs through which we interpret our experiences – it is our view of the world. The simplest common denominator of all religious and philosophical worldviews is the believe that something is wrong with the world and there is some way to fix it." Godaway goes on to talk about how when we watch movies, we are seeing a worldview interpretation of that same drama of humanity – something wrong – some way to fix it.

Well, a mentor of mine in InterVarsity is a guy named Dr. James Sire. When I was first in engineering school at the University of Illinois, I grabbed up Dr. Sire's book because it helped me make sense of the religious and philosophical pluralism that was surrounding me as a college student. His book, *The Universe Next Door*, is probably one of the best books on this idea of worldview out there. It's in its fourth or fifth printing. It's an incredible book. I would recommend you tracking it down. Well, in his book, Dr. Sire defines what a worldview is and then catalogs several example of worldviews that are dominate in our world today – whether we see them in religions or whether we see them in philosophical ways of thinking. Here are a few examples: theism, deism, existentialism, etc. – they go on and on. So if you're curious about this idea of worldview and you just want a great book to grab a hold of, I'd highly recommend Dr. Sire's book. It's still in print and if you hit down at the bottom of my video here, you'll see a link so that you can read a little bit more about that book.

Well, here's how Dr. Sire defines worldview and it's a real helpful basic definition. "*A worldview is a set of assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false which we hold consciously or subconsciously, about the basic make-up of our world.*" It's like the set of spectacles setting on our nose that helps us see everything else.

Another way that he's thought of it, enriching it with this idea of a narrative is this, "*The worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expresses as a story or in a set of presuppositions which we hold consistently or inconsistently about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.*"

So I hope you're getting an idea for what a worldview is. Now Dr. Sire would go on to say that what a worldview does for you is really important. In his book, *Universe Next Door*, he says that a worldview – any worldview no matter what it is – whether it Christian theism or whether it's naturalism – answers some very basic questions.

And here are those questions – I want to give them to you rapid fire. These are the seven basic worldview questions that any way of looking at the world – has to answer. So write them down if you want – they're really good.

## **7 Basic Questions any Worldview Answers:**

1. **What is prime reality – the really real?** Prime reality is like a prime number. It's something that's not divisible by any other number. What's at the very, very foundation or the very bottom or base of how we view reality? Some people would answer, "Well that has to be God because God created everything." Somebody from a naturalistic worldview would say, "No – just the material universe – that's all there ever is or every was."
2. **What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world that we see around us?** When you look out your window, when you read the newspaper, when you get on a web page – when you just take in the world around you – what is the nature of external reality? Our answers might be that this world is just this autonomous thing – that it just keeps moving and rolling along and we're just some part of a huge elaborate society that's eking out its existence. People may think though that their worldview informs them differently about the world around them – that the world around us is objective and separate from ourselves and we can differentiate ourselves from our surroundings. So on and so forth – it gets very elaborate depending on the worldview that you espouse.
3. **What is a human being?** And this week, we're going to look at how Project 4:4 asks that very same question in Psalm 8 in the Bible. What is man that you are aware of him? Who is humanity? A humanist would answer the question, "Well a man or mankind is the center of his own consideration." He's the highest evolved species according to naturalism – that worldview. Or according to Christian theism – "He's a creature made in God's image designed to reflect who God is in a unique way among everything else that God created."
4. **What happens to a person at death?** We were just considering that last week in our Tough Question series. Do we just depart and go into some shadowy existence – is it "lights out" as the naturalist says – absolute nothing after death? Well, any worldview is going to have an answer for that question.
5. **Why is it possible to know anything at all?** Philosophers call that epistemology – how can we know things? Do we simply know things because of the scientific method and only the things that science tells us are the things that we know – or do we know things by other means?
6. **How do we know what is right and wrong?** Any and every worldview is going to have some comment either explicitly or implicitly about how we differentiate between what's right and what's wrong. Every society, every culture, every philosophy has touched on this great question. How do we know? What is the basis of right and wrong?
7. **What is the meaning of human history?** For some monistic worldviews – history is just cyclical – it just keeps going around and around and around.

There's an idea of reincarnation within the human spirit and the human experience – so humanity doesn't have any progress to it when we look at history. Others say that history is linear – that we're moving from one thing to the next, to the next in some kind of chain or sequence of meaning when we stop and look at it. Some people say that human history is absolutely meaningless. Nihilism says that there is absolutely no meaning in the facts of history as we study them and as we look at their progress.

Well I want to just come back to you for a minute as we wrap up today. I want you to think about your worldview. What is that weird looking contraption that you've got wearing on your head right now that helps you take in reality and see what it looks like and interpret what it means? I realize that a lot of people watching these videos are probably Christians, so in case you haven't thought about it – your worldview is Christian theism.

Well, what we're going to do in the next couple of installments here in Tough Questions – we're going to compare Christian theism with naturalism – these are two of the most dominant worldviews in our world today. We want to reflect those off some of the things that are coming out of the Psalms – so stay tuned for the next few videos where we take a look at naturalism vs. Christian theism.

Well, if you have any comments for me or questions about the idea of a worldview, hit on the link right below the video and we'll chat.

It was great being with you. This is Tim Perry, Pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church.