

You're listening to What Does the Word Say, a series of podcasts on biblical theology produced by Grace and Glory Media, and I'm Dr. Spencer. Our usual host Mr. Roby is not with me again today because we are both still obeying the stay-at-home order issued as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We are also continuing to take a short break from our series on systematic theology. This week I want to talk about how to think biblically.

It is important for Christians to think biblically at all times, but it is especially important in difficult times like these. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 the apostle Paul wrote, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."¹

We are not free to think whatever we want to think. Jesus Christ is Lord of everything, including our thinking. It dishonors God and therefore displeases him when we think improperly. So, for example, if we think that the coronavirus pandemic is somehow outside of his control, we dishonor him. To think that way is to disparage his sovereignty and power.

Now someone may think that by believing God is not in control of this pandemic he is defending God from being charged with not being good or loving, but that is a completely unbiblical way to think. We discussed God's providence in some detail in Sessions 88 through 93, but for now let me just note that if God is not in control of every detail of every single event in the universe, then we can't trust any of his promises.

Also, the Bible clearly tells us that God *is* in control of everything, so to say otherwise is unbiblical. I won't go back through all that we covered before, Session 89 provides a number of Scripture references in support of this statement, but let me just give three examples for today.

First, in Proverbs 16:33 we are told that "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Now casting a lot was the Old Testament equivalent of rolling the dice, so this proverb is explicitly telling us that God is in control even of things that people tend to think of as random events.

Second, in Psalm 139:16 King David was praying to God and said that "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." This shows us that God is also in control of our lives. In fact, we are told elsewhere that he knits us together in our mother's wombs (Ps 139:13), he ordains when, where and to whom we are born (e.g., Ps 139:13, Is 45:13, Acts 17:26). He elects us unto salvation or passes us by and leaves us to be justly punished for our sins (e.g., Rom 9:13). He has ordained the exact moment and cause of our death (e.g., 1 Sam 28:19, Ps 139:16). And all of this was done before the creation of the world (e.g., Eph 1:4).

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Third, in the New Testament we read, in Matthew 10:29, that Jesus said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.” Which makes it clear that even seemingly unimportant events in this world are under God’s control.

And we also can’t restrict God’s sovereignty by saying that he isn’t in control of disasters and sinful acts as well. With regard to so-called natural disasters, God has established the fixed laws of heaven and earth as we read in Jeremiah 33:25, which certainly include the physical laws governing weather, earthquakes and so on. But God is still in control of these things. For example, Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee by simply commanding the wind and the waves to be still as we read in Mark 4:39. And with regard to sin, God does not directly *cause* sin, but he is in complete control of it. If he so chooses, he can stop anyone from doing any particular sinful act. And yet, we must admit the obvious fact that there are very many natural disasters and wicked sinful things that happen in this world. So, it is clear that God allows them to happen, and he does so for a purpose. He is not capricious.

It is sometimes argued, although incorrectly, that the existence of evil in this world proves that God is either not completely good, or not completely sovereign. We answered that charge in Session 74 and so all I’m going to say now is that the statement is the result of a faulty assumption; namely, that God’s purpose is to make our lives here on earth as pleasant as possible, which simply is not true, that isn’t his purpose.

In order to think biblically, in other words correctly, about anything that happens in this life we must first have a biblical perspective on life, which includes understanding that God’s purpose is the manifestation of his own glory. The biblical perspective is also eternal. This life is short, but we are all made for an eternal existence, either in hell or in heaven. When you consider those two eternal realities, all of sudden you realize that the most important thing, in fact, we could say the *only* truly important thing in this life for everyone is determine to which of these two possible eternal homes you are headed.

All of human history is subservient to this ultimate purpose. God is creating a people for himself, which is variously called the church (e.g., 1 Tim 3:5), or the family of God (e.g., 1 Pet 4:17), or the bride of Christ (e.g., Eph 5:24-32), or God’s inheritance (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1), or God’s treasured possession (e.g., Ex 19:5). The one thing needful, as Christ said to Martha in Luke 10:42, is to make sure that Jesus Christ is our personal Lord and Savior, “for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” as we are told in Acts 4:12.

To think biblically means to view everything through the lens of Scripture. In other words, it is to have a biblical worldview. Phil Johnson, the late professor of law at the UC Berkeley Law School and author of a number of excellent books, wrote that “Understanding worldview is a bit like trying to see the lens of one’s own eye. We do not ordinarily see our own worldview, but we see everything else by looking through it. Put simply, our worldview is the window by which we

view the world, and decide, often subconsciously, what is real and important, or unreal and unimportant.”²

The common idea that we can build our worldview from scratch by being entirely neutral observers of reality and then analyzing the data and determining what we think is right is completely false. There is no such thing as a neutral observer and everyone, the scientist no less than the artist, views *everything* through the lens of his own preexisting worldview. And he will work to incorporate everything he sees into this preexisting worldview.

Now, our worldview is a bit like an onion, it has layers to it. On the outer layers we have opinions that are things we think are probably true, but we are perfectly able and willing to change those views if we find them to be inconsistent with the world we observe. So there certainly is a sense in which we can correct and build our worldview. But as you peel off the layers and get deeper and deeper into your worldview, you get into things that you believe far more strongly. Views that it would be incredibly difficult to convince you to change. And when you get to the very core of your worldview, you come to your most dearly held personal commitments, and the most important of these by far is whether or not you believe the God of the Bible exists and whether or not you believe the Bible to be his infallible Word. Every single human being alive either believes these statements are true, or not true. There are no exceptions. To think that you haven't decided yet, is to have decided in the negative.

And these two statements are really inseparable since the Bible is the only place we receive objective revelation of the true and living God and his way of salvation. Now, we can learn many things about God from the world around us and from our own nature, but that revelation doesn't provide sufficient information to be saved and to properly love and serve God; it is only sufficient to leave us without excuse when we stand before God.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-20 that “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” In other words, this revelation, which is called general revelation, is sufficient for obligating every single human being to seek to know the true and living God, but no one does so. Paul wrote in Romans 3:11 that “there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.”

So, all people in their natural state have a fundamental, core belief, or presupposition, that the God of the Bible does not exist and the Bible is not his infallible Word. In one sense everyone knows better but, as Paul wrote, they suppress this truth. And because of this fundamental presupposition at the core of his worldview, the unbeliever thinks differently than a born-again Christian will think. Paul wrote, in Romans 1:21, immediately after the verses I read a minute ago, that “although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but

² In the Foreword to Nancy Pearcey's book, *Total Truth; Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, Crossway Books, 2004

their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” He also wrote, in Ephesians 4:17, “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” An unbeliever’s thinking is futile because it will never arrive at the right answer about God.

It isn’t that unbelievers can’t design cell phones and GPS systems, build cars and bridges and so on. They can do all of those things. But whenever it comes to thinking about God, they will get the wrong answer. And God is the only reality that truly matters in the end. Because where you spend eternity, whether in heaven or in hell, depends on your answer to one simple question, which Christ posed to his disciples in Matthew 16:15, “Who do you say I am?”

Unbelievers will give a range of answers to this question. Some may simply say that Jesus Christ is a fictional character and never really existed at all. Some will say that he is a real, historical figure, but that he was just a normal man who was put to death by the Romans in 1st-century Palestine and that was the end of him. His disciples then told people he had been raised from the dead and started what we call Christianity. Some unbelievers will concede that Christ was a great moral teacher, but nothing more.

Some unbelievers will even say that Jesus Christ is God and will call themselves Christians, but they have made up a different Jesus in their minds rather than believing in the Jesus who is revealed to us in his Word, the Bible. And this is nothing new. In his second letter to the church in Corinth Paul was rebuking them for not remaining true to the gospel and he wrote, in 2 Corinthians 11:4, “For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.” But a different Jesus is of no use, in fact a different Jesus, a different gospel, will damn you. Jesus himself tells us in Matthew 7:21 that “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” That statement is terrifying. Jesus goes on to say that *many* will come to him this way and he will tell them to depart from him. In other words, he will send them to hell.

Only a true, born-again Christian will give the right answer to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?”. A true believer will say that Jesus Christ is the second person of the eternal, almighty triune God, the Creator, Sustainer, Judge and Redeemer of all mankind. This eternal second person of the holy Trinity became incarnate when the Holy Spirit caused the virgin Mary to conceive. She then gave birth and Jesus grew up, lived a perfect sinless life, and willingly gave his life on the cross as the perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all those who put their faith in him.

This radical difference in worldviews between a believer and an unbeliever leads to a radical difference in thinking. But there are two important points to make about this difference. First, you cannot change your own worldview in this radical way. You must be born again. You must cry out for God to do a mighty work and give you a new heart and a new spirit so that you can repent and believe on Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in John Chapter 6, Verses 44 and 65, “No one

can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” and “no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”

And the second important point, and what I want to spend the rest of our time on today, is that if you have been born again, you still need to work in order to develop proper biblical thinking. A born-again person has the right presupposition at the core of his worldview, and he has the Spirit to enable him to understand God’s Word and apply it, but he also still has his old sinful nature to fight against and he needs to study the Word seriously, put it into practice, mortify his sin and walk in holiness in order to grow in faith and knowledge. We can’t just assume that if we have been born again, or regenerated, we suddenly know how to properly live the Christian life.

That is why the New Testament epistles always contain both indicatives and imperatives. The indicatives are there to instruct us about certain facts and the imperatives are there to command us how we are to live in the light of those facts. And we are given pastors and teachers to help us understand and apply the Word properly. We read in Ephesians 4:11-16 that it was Christ himself who, “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Without proper teaching and study, you can be born again and yet remain an infant in Christ, being “tossed back and forth by the waves” of this life. Waves like the coronavirus pandemic. And you can be “blown here and there by every wind of teaching”, like the false preachers who will tell you that if you have enough faith God will certainly heal you and keep your finances from failing. Now, to be clear, the Bible says that God is *able* to heal you and keep your finances from failing, and it is proper for you to pray for that. But the Bible is equally clear that God does not promise to do so. He will do whatever is best for you and will give him the greatest glory.

For example, even the apostle Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to humble him. He prayed three times for God to remove it, in fact we are told he *pleaded* with God to remove it, and yet God said “No.” We read in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that God’s answer was to say, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” It would obviously be silly to say that Paul’s faith was not sufficient, so the false teachers who say things like this are wicked charlatans on their way to hell and they want to bring you along with them. Don’t listen to them! Read the Word of God. Study it. Know what it says. Be guided by pious and learned men. If you study the Word yourself and pray, you can tell the difference. Go to our website, whatdoesthewordsay.org, and request your free copy of *Good News for All People* by the Rev. P.G. Mathew. If you read it prayerfully and then continue to study the Word, you will find it is written by a pious and learned man and that it properly expounds the Word of God, which is able

to save you and equip you for difficult times, which the Bible says we will all go through. Times like we are in right now.

In our session last week, I mentioned that we must all make our calling and election sure because if we are not God's children, then his promises are not for us and we have no real hope. The way you make your calling and election sure is by prayerfully studying God's Word and then examining your life in the light of the many tests given to us in that Word. I will speak more about that next week, but for today let me just say that if you have been born again, if the love of God is in you, then you can take great solace in his promises.

You may die from Covid-19, or your spouse may die from it, or you may lose your job and much of your savings, these are all possible even for God's children. But you have eternal life and God has promised that he will never leave you nor forsake you. You can rejoice as I noted last week even as you go through these trials. In fact, let me close with one of God's great promises to his children. In Philippians 4:6-7 God commands us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Brothers and sisters, what a glorious promise this is! The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, can be ours even as we go through trials. Do not be anxious. Go to God with thanksgiving and praise and, yes, even with your requests for worldly things. He may not grant all of your worldly requests, but he does promise to give you his peace. And he promises, in Roman 8:28, that in all things, even this pandemic, he works for the good of those who love him.

So, may God bless you with his peace. And I hope that you will join with me in praying that God will use this pandemic to draw many people to himself, that we would see a mighty revival.

And remember that you can send your questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would love to hear from you.