

Worldview Implications

Introduction

This topic we will be considering some of the implications of our worldview. To do so we will be asking some tough questions concerning truth, morality, and suffering. To prepare for this topic, you will need to read chapters 7 and 9 in the textbook. Chapters 8 and 10 are optional but recommended.

Our hope is that we maintain a longing for truth and wisdom like that expressed by David in his prayer, "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart" (Ps 51:6, ESV).

Absolute vs. Relative Truth

Truth is conformity to fact, reality, or actuality. In other words, truth is that which is real, not imaginary. So, by definition we might say that truth is objective, and therefore absolute. To say truth is relative is to say that absolute truth is not true for everyone in every circumstance. It is common today to hear people speak of truth being "whatever you want it to be," and "what is true for you may not be true for me." This kind of thinking is steeped in self-deception for it essentially makes an absolute statement that denies absolute truth.

Atheistic philosophers may dismiss truth as subjective, a matter of one's opinion or interpretation of reality for they deny the possibility of a God who is the giver of truth. The only real truths for them are those that align with scientific evidence. Without God there can be no moral and spiritual absolute truths.

Absolute truth then, by its very nature, is exclusive. Exclusivism, especially in today's world, seems offensive since we want everyone to feel accepted and affirmed in their beliefs, whatever they may be. The Christian message is to love and accept all people, and respect their beliefs. One ought to be able to respect another's beliefs without necessarily accepting those beliefs. And our hope is that people not be offended by the fact that Christianity calls all people to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. If it is not true, we can understand why people feel that it is offensive. If it is true, Christians would be guilty of a greater wrong against humanity for not proclaiming it.

Christians readily agree that many truths may be discovered through observation of the natural world, or science. Such general revelation, we believe, reveals not only truths about nature, but also may reveal truths about our Creator. Psalm 19 begins with these words: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (ESV). But truth goes far beyond what our physical senses may perceive, with or without scientific instruments.

Moral laws given by special revelation to humanity by God include the two great commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30; Matt 22:37; Deut 6:5), "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31; Matt 22:39; Lev 19:18), and the Ten Commandments (Exod 20; Deut 5). These timeless moral truths act as a window through which we may see the character of God and as a mirror by which we may see ourselves and our need of a savior.

In her great book *Total Truth*, author Nancy Pearcey (2004) quotes Francis Shaeffer from an address he gave at the University of Notre Dame in April 1981: "Biblical Christianity is Truth concerning total reality – and the intellectual holding of that total Truth and then living in the light of that Truth" (p. 15). Such total truth may be learned through observation of the natural world (General Revelation) and by Special Revelation – God revealing truths to people as recorded in the Bible and culminating with God Himself coming to humanity in

the person of Jesus Christ.

Christians believe as J. Gresham Machen (1987) once stated, that "truth is truth, however learned" (p. 81). And to take it one step further, we likewise believe that "all truth is God's truth" (Gaebelein, 1954, p. 48). Indeed, we may say that everything about God is centered on truth. We read of "the God of truth" in Isaiah 65:16. Jesus is described as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and speaks of Himself as the embodiment of truth (John 14:6). And the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). So it is not surprising the Paul refers to the Scriptures as "the Word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Truth is important to Christians. The Christian faith is based on historical events that are very well documented—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, spoken of not only by the biblical writers, but also Jewish and Roman historians. And the veracity of the entire Bible is corroborated by archaeology with regard to dates, places, rulers, and much more.

Faith and Reason

It is evident then that truth is important to God. Jesus told us that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). God clearly desires His people to be well informed, and when we speak of Him or go before Him in worship we must do so with faith (spirit) and reason (truth). Christians often get criticized for having blind faith, as if our faith is rooted in ancient fables and wishful thinking.

Faith is only as effectual as the object of that faith is true and powerful. Otherwise faith is merely positive thinking. But since the object of Christian faith is a true and powerful God who not only created us but entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ at a critical time in human history to restore us to Himself, our faith is not in vain.

Pope John Paul II made this profound statement:

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves. (John Paul II, 1998, p. 1)

Faith and reason are not only both necessary for a true view of God, but also for a true view of ourselves.

Everybody, without exception, lives by both faith and reason, but differ as to what their faith is placed in and how balanced they are with the two. An atheist may have strong faith in science, trusting the results of scientific reasoning, even though history shows that on many different topics science has changed its explanation as new discoveries have been made through the years. Christians likewise have had to adjust their understanding of biblical doctrine from time to time as theologians have perfected their understanding of biblical truth and have had to integrate that truth with scientific discoveries such as the heliocentric (sun-centered solar system) model.

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

The age-old question still haunts people: If God is all good and all-powerful, then how could He allow suffering in the world? As we saw from our study in Topic 3 on the fall, the world was not created to include suffering, it came as a result of the rebellion of humanity, when Adam and Eve first decided to rebel and go their own way.

What is evident from the fall is that evil exists in our world because humanity was created with free will, providing everyone with the choice to love and serve God or to love and serve ourselves. Job is the supreme

example, how Satan tried to prove that Job only loved and served God because God was so good to him. So God gave permission for Job to go through great suffering. He lost his children, his livestock, and his health. And yet he said to his wife, "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). And later he said, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). It is easy to give glory to God when everything is fine and we are feeling good, but the test comes when we can love and trust Him when afflicted. In the end, of course, God more than restored all that Job lost.

So Job provides an outstanding example of one who faced evil and held strong to his faith. Evil is something like darkness. There is no such thing as darkness; it is merely the absence of light. People who are evil may become that way by fleeing from God, the Light, and therefore lack true goodness. The only certain way to free oneself from evil is to run to the Light of Christ who is the Light of the World.

Christians may readily understand that we live in a fallen world and therefore suffering is bound to happen, but why for the Christian who has repented and loves God? The Bible actually has a lot to say about why God allows Christians to suffer. Below is a list of 11 reasons with the accompanying Bible references; the first several apply to all people:

1. Suffering is a result of the Fall, and therefore a part of life (Luke 13:4-5; John 16:33; 1 Pet 2:19).
2. Suffering increases our compassion and equips us to comfort others who suffer (2 Cor 1:3-4).
3. Suffering strengthens our character (Rom 5:3-5; Jas 1:2-4).
4. Suffering is often a direct result of our sin, and therefore teaches us obedience (Heb 5:7-8; Ps 107:17; 119:67, 71).
5. Suffering sometimes is a tool of God's discipline (Heb 12:7-11).
6. Suffering draws us to God, compelling us to repent of our sins (Ps 25:16-18).
7. Suffering keeps us humble and dependent on Christ (2 Cor 12:7-10).
8. Suffering compels us to look up and long for our heavenly redemption (Ps 121; Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17).
9. Suffering joins us closer to Christ and His sufferings, especially in persecution (1 Pet 4:1-2, 12-16, 19; 5:8-10; Luke 9:23; Phil 3:10).
10. Even in the midst of suffering God is aiming for our ultimate good (Jer 29:11-13; Rom 8:28; Gen 50:20).
11. Especially in the midst of suffering God wants us to experience His amazing love (Ps 90:14-15; Lam 3:19-23).

Here is a powerful quote from an amazing lady who has had her share of suffering, Joni Eareckson Tada, who is quadriplegic: "Affliction is the gristmill where pride is reduced to powder, leaving our souls naked, bare, and bonded to Christ. And it feels beautiful" (Tada & Estes, 1997, p. 143).

And from a very inspiring book, *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy*, by Larry Crabb (2001), based on the story of Ruth from Naomi's perspective:

In fact, what He's doing while we suffer is leading us into the depths of our being, into the center of our soul where we feel our strongest passions. It's there that we discover our desire for God. We begin to feel a desire to know Him that not only survives all our pain, but actually thrives in it until that desire becomes more intense than our desire for all the good things we still want. Through the pain of shattered lower dreams, we wake up to the realization that we want an encounter with God more than

we want the blessings of life. And that begins a revolution in our lives. (p. 4)

God will not violate our free will, so when we take the wrong path we suffer. When we encounter evil or negligent people we may suffer. And we also may suffer due to accidents, natural causes, and illnesses. Such tragedies remind us that life is short and we must take what time we are given to get right with God and realize that the life we have and the days we are given are gifts. Beyond this we must remember that all such unfortunate tragedies are under the sovereign, watchful eye of God, and He will always be with us to see us through. More than that, He will give us himself.

So for the Christian, the concept and understanding of suffering fits very nicely into a worldview that provides meaning and purpose to humanity in the context of the love and power of God.

Assignments

In addition to your worksheet and quiz, you have a guided analysis worksheet to complete. In this paper you will have the opportunity to explore your own experience of suffering along with other penetrating questions concerning the problem of evil.

References

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