Worldview Evangelism: Understanding and Engaging Underlying Beliefs

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Introduction
We want to strive for the advance of the Gospel. Often, however, we find it easier to support those who go overseas than to share the gospel with those across the street. Sometimes we are afraid to say something because we are not sure how to start. However, another major issue we have is we do not know where to go once we have started. This workshop will give some direction in sharing the gospel in our world today.

I. Background Reminders
   A. God must open people’s eyes in order for them to believe (2 Cor 4:3-6)
      1. The reason people reject the gospel is not ultimately a problem of the mind but a problem of the heart
   B. We must present the gospel in order for people to believe (Rom 10:14)
      1. God has ordained the world in such a way that He wants His people to bring the gospel to the lost. He does not use angels, visions, etc. He uses people preaching the gospel
      2. So no one will believe the gospel unless it is presented to them.
   C. Our goal in evangelism is to present the gospel clearly (Col 4:4)
      1. We want to be winsome as we present the gospel.
      2. But we ultimately must present the gospel clearly. We want people to understand the Gospel when we talk to them.
         a. That means we must know the gospel clearly.
         b. That means we must present the gospel in a way that they can understand.

II. Problem with Modern Evangelism
   A. We often assume a largely Christian background/understanding when we evangelize
      1. Many of the strategies and techniques for evangelism were formed when America was largely Judeo-Christian in its thinking
   B. Today, many people come from places where the common background/understanding is not Christian
      1. With more and more immigration coming from Asia, those coming are no longer from a Christian background. They are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.
C. Many in the West no longer have a Christian background/understanding
   1. Whereas people in the past at least had some knowledge of the Bible
      (went to SS, VBS, etc.), many now have almost no knowledge
   2. Atheists used to be Christian atheists, but now they are Muslim, Buddhist,
      and Hindu atheists (or people who think they are Christian atheists but
      don’t know really know anything about the Christian God they are
      denying.)
   3. We can see evidence of this drift from a Judeo-Christian foundation in the
      growing acceptance of extra-marital sex, homosexuality, abortion,
      euthanasia, etc.

D. Example:
   1. “If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He were to ask you
      ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’ what would you say?”
      a. Assumes we only get one life—“But I don’t get just one life—I get
         thousands”
      b. Assumes life after death—“When we die that’s it. We just go back
         to the soil and serve as nutrients for plants.”
      c. Assumes there is one God
         i. “I don’t believe in God.”
         ii. “Which God would I be standing before?”
      d. Assumes God is judge—“God doesn’t judge”
      e. Assumes there is heaven
         i. “Which level of heaven are we talking about? Could I at
            least live on earth?”
         ii. “Is heaven like Nirvana?”
      f. Assumes the goal is to be good—it expects answers about why we
         are good enough to get into heaven. But what if the goal is to be
         free? Or what if there is no good or evil?

III. The Importance of Worldviews
   A. What is a worldview?
      1. A way of understanding the world. Answers to ultimate questions that
         allow us to interpret all of reality
      2. Our worldview provides the basis for which we explain reality
         a. Examples:
            i. You get what you prayed for—answered prayer or just
               coincidence?
            ii. You get sick—do you go get medicine or try to appease the
                evil spirits?
            iii. Something good happens—blessing from Lord, luck, or
                result of karma?
B. What are common elements of a worldview

1. What is ideal?
   a. Christianity—God ruling over His creation, which is perfectly subject to Him (Garden of Eden; Kingdom)
   b. Buddhism—nirvana
   c. Scientism—nature/science

2. What is the problem?
   a. Christianity—Sin; man denying God’s role and trying to be his own god (breaking God’s law)
   b. Buddhism—suffering
   c. Scientism—illusion of religion (failure to utilize science properly)

3. What is the solution?
   a. Christianity—salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
   b. Buddhism—Noble Eightfold-path, which includes right knowledge, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and meditation
   c. Scientism—Getting rid of our left-over religious beliefs and evolving into what we should now be

4. How should we live?
   a. Christianity—Law of Christ
   b. Buddhism—Dharma (natural law that governs the universe)
   c. Scientism—According to nature/science

5. NOTE: Our evangelism tends to focus only on the solution. That works when people have a similar worldview (e.g., nominal Christians/Catholics) but not when they have a very different worldview.

C. Why does a worldview matter?

1. Worldviews often contain defeater beliefs
   a. These are beliefs that by their very nature keep us from accepting other beliefs (Belief A means you will not accept Belief B)
   b. They are often assumed rather than consciously adopted.

1These elements are adapted from the four part approach Charles Prothero uses for religions: problem, solution, technique for reaching the solution, and exemplars who chart the path. Though not all worldviews are religions, there is significant overlap between religions and worldviews. God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—And Why Their Differences Matter. Kindle ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), p. 14.

2“A defeater for a belief b, then, is another belief d such that, given my noetic structure, I cannot rationally hold b, given that I believe d.” Alvin Plantinga, Warranted Christian Belief (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 361.
i. If you keep asking why, you eventually get to a foundational belief or presupposition.

ii. People think they just don’t believe B, but it’s really because they believe A.³

c. Examples

i. Everything in the world is the result of evolutionary processes—defeats belief in God

ii. Truth is culturally determined—defeats belief in Christianity as the only way for salvation; or even that Christianity is absolutely true.

IV. Addressing the Worldview

A. Understanding

1. Understanding the Christian Worldview

a. You need to know more than just the solution. You need to know the whole picture.

2. Understanding the non-Christian Worldview

a. If you are going to explain the Gospel clearly it is helpful to know some of where the other person is coming from.

B. Undermining the non-Christian Worldview

1. Too often we try to defend our beliefs, which reinforces the idea that we have beliefs while other people do not. By undermining their worldview you are forcing the person to realize they simply believe something different that they cannot defend.

2. Revealing the self-defeating nature of some beliefs

a. “Everything in the world is the result of evolutionary processes.”

i. If everything is the result of evolutionary processes, then our mind is also the result of evolutionary processes. If that is true, our thoughts are not rational thoughts but are simply the kinds of thoughts that are conducive to living. In other words, our thoughts are not true—they are simply helpful for survival. So, we have no reason to trust our thinking. Thus, the belief in evolution destroys all thought.

3. Revealing the inconsistency of some beliefs

a. This is what Paul does in Acts 18:28-29

i. “As even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” ²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we

ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.”

b. “Truth is culturally determined.”
   i. If truth is culturally determined, then we have no right to state that another culture is wrong.
   ii. Almost everyone believes Hitler was wrong. If so, they don’t really believe truth is culturally determined.

V. Value of Questions
A. Questions help in understanding the worldview
   1. As you talk to people, ask why they do what they do or make certain truth claims.
   2. Questions force you to listen to the other person, not simply to give your idea.
   3. Key questions for determining a worldview:
      a. What is prime reality? (God, gods, material cosmos)
      b. What is the nature of the world around us? (created or autonomous, orderly or chaotic, matter or mind/spirit, connected or distinct)
      c. What does it mean to be human? (a machine, a god, a person in God’s image, an evolved ape)
      d. What happens at death? (extinction, reincarnation, transformation, shadowy existence)
      e. Why is it possible to know anything at all? (made in image of all-knowing God, developed reason through evolutionary process)
      f. How do we tell what is right and wrong? (made in image of good God, determined by human choice, what feels good, what is practical/useful)
      g. What is history about? (realize God’s purposes, make paradise on earth, struggle for survival)

B. Questions help in undermining the worldview

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5 The following questions are taken from James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 20.

6 These two kinds of questions come from Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism: Engaging People’s Hearts the Way Jesus Did* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004).
1. Could you explain that?
   a. This can be used to help understand someone else’s worldview.
   b. This can be used to undermine someone else’s worldview by forcing them to defend an indefensible position

2. Really?
   a. This can be used to undermine someone else’s worldview by showing that people really do not believe what they claim.

3. Jesus seems to use this approach
   a. Rich young ruler (“Why do you call me good?”—could you explain what you mean by good?)
   b. Good Samaritan (Not “who is my neighbor” because even a Samaritan knows that. The question is “Are you being a neighbor?”—do you really not know who your neighbor is?)

VI. Examples:
   A. Why should I believe the Bible? (“It’s full of errors.” “Science has disproven the Bible.” “It’s immoral”)
      1. Could you explain that?
         a. “Could you show me some of the errors?”
         b. “How has science disproven the Bible?”
         c. “How do you know what is moral or immoral?”
      2. Really?
         a. “Does science determine truth? If so, how does science determine that science determines truth?”
            i. This is a self-defeating belief
         b. “Who determines morality? If God does not exist, how can you claim that something is moral or immoral?” (i.e., “Do you really believe in morality?”)
   B. Why should I believe Christianity? (“All religions teach the same thing.” “Everyone needs to decide truth for themselves.” “It’s intolerant to claim you have the truth.”)
      1. Could you explain that?
         a. “How do all religions teach the same thing? What do they teach?”
            i. If someone claims that all religions teach the same thing, they are demonstrating that they have never studied other religions.
         b. “Why is it intolerant to claim you have the truth?”
            i. It is not intolerant to claim you have the truth. It is intolerant if you harm others who do not have the truth.
      2. Really?
a. “What if someone decides that truth for them is that white people are the supreme race?”
   i. Everyone believes something is wrong and would ultimately like to see it stopped. One of the most common in our culture is pedophilia. If they believe something is wrong and should be stopped, they don’t really believe that everyone can decide truth for themselves.

b. “So the teaching that there is One Supreme Loving God is the same as the teaching that you don’t have a self because everything is one?”

c. “You are claiming to have the truth by telling me I can’t claim to have the truth. Is that intolerant?”
   i. Their truth claim is: “It is true that claiming to have the truth is intolerant.” But they do not believe that their truth claim is intolerant. Thus, they do not really believe that claiming to have the truth is intolerant.

VII. Concluding Exhortations
   A. Study the Scriptures
   B. Build relationships with unbelievers
   C. Trust the Spirit