

# THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND\*

Rev. Dr. Danny McCain  
University of Jos, Nigeria

*This paper was presented at the Faculty Enrichment Program at the Redeemer University, Lagos, Nigeria on 31 May 2010. McCain is a Professor of the New Testament at the University of Jos in Jos, Nigeria, and serves as the International Director at Large for the International Institute for Christian Studies (IICS).*

*\*Perhaps the single most important mentor in my life was a man named Dr. Stephen Herron who was the president of a Christian college I attended. He conducted the marriage ceremony for my wife and me and also preached the funeral of my first son. Dr. Herron was well known in our circles for a specific sermon. I will honor him by borrowing his sermon title for this particular presentation.*

## Introduction

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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 (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).*

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy; which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).*

Both of these passages use strong military language to describe the Christian faith. Note these statements:

10:3: *we do not wage war as the world does.*

10:4: *the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.*

10:4b: *they have divine power to demolish strongholds.*

If we stopped reading at that point, we might think that Paul was urging the Corinthians to create some kind of Christian militia that would deal with all those who oppose them.

However, in the next verse, Paul explains to us the kind of warfare he and all Christians are waging: “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.” It is the arguments and pretensions of Satan and anything that is contrary to the knowledge of God that is our enemy. It is these things that we must fight against. This terminology suggests that we should be aggressive in our attempts to develop a Christian way of thinking and that one of our most important responsibilities is to fight against and destroy the ungodly way of thinking.

In Colossians Paul uses the same metaphor but in a defensive manner. He says “*see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.*” Philosophy is a way of thinking. Paul is suggesting here that just as certain as we should seek to change the thinking of others, those same people are also seeking to change our thinking. Paul is warning the Colossians that there is a battle in the mind that is always taking

place. Either we are aggressively trying to change our own way of thinking and that of others, or others are trying to change our way of thinking.

There are many battles going on around the world today.

- There are literal military battles going on in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Somalia and sometimes even in Jos.
- There are political battles going on in which people are contesting to win political arguments and wrestle the power of government away from others. These are happening in Washington and London and Abuja and other places as we speak.
- During the last month, there has been a huge battle going on in the Gulf of Mexico, a battle in which petroleum engineers are trying to stop a massive oil leak that is polluting the Louisiana Gulf Coast.

However, the real battle that we are fighting in this world is not one of the typical battles that we wage in this world.

- It is not a battle for the control of land or water resources.
- It is not a battle over financial or political control.
- It is not a battle with the environment.
- It is not even one of our typical “church” battles over the style of worship or the structure of our buildings or whether or not women should be in leadership positions.

The battle that we Christians are constantly fighting is the battle for the mind.

- It is a battle about the way we think.
- It is a battle over who and what will shape the way we view life.
- It is a battle over the issues that influence our prejudices and preferences.
- It is a battle over the control of the innermost part of our human nature—the real you and the real me.

To put this in terms related to this conference, the most important battle that we as Christians are

## Insert, p.2, *Contact*

engaged in right now is the battle over our worldview.

### **Worldview**

The term “worldview” refers to the comprehensive and controlling view of life that has been shaped by our family, our culture, our environment, our education, and all other inputs into our lives. Our worldview influences everything we do, including our language, our work, our character, and our interactions with others. The worldview of a person affects such basic views of life as what is right and wrong, what is appropriate and inappropriate, and even what is funny and what is not funny.

The worldview of a person is the lens through which one sees and experiences life. It filters all of the information of life, and that filtered summary of life, in turn, influences all of the attitudes and decisions in life. The worldview we have is like wearing dark sunglasses. If you wear dark sunglasses, everything you see will appear to be dark.

Let me explain how our worldview shapes our way of thinking, and especially how that influences cross-cultural relationships and communication. I have lived in Nigeria for about the same time I have lived in the US as an adult. Therefore, it is possible for me to see and understand the way both Americans and Nigerians think. Obviously, there is no single “American worldview” or “Nigerian worldview.” Everyone’s worldview is slightly different. However, there are some general overriding issues that people tend to agree on.

Americans tend to be very precise people about many things, including language, time, and honesty. For example, the abstract concept of truth is very important to us. It is one of the highest demonstrations of integrity to do exactly what you say you will do. Therefore, when you have a budget, it is essential to spend money exactly as the budget demands. No matter how important another need is, if the money is not allocated to that budget category, the money will not be spent for that need. Because of our view of integrity, our conscience will not allow us to do otherwise.

On the other hand, to the typical Nigerian, and I suspect the typical African, relationships are more important than some abstract concept like truth. If telling others the truth will embarrass them or cause them pain, it is easy not to tell the truth. And budgets are only spending guidelines, even if they have been approved by our superiors. If a human need arises that is not in the budget, but you still have access to money, you just use the money available to meet that need, regardless of what budget category it has to come from. After all, the needs of people are more important than some budget category on a piece of paper.

This was made very clear to me when I first came to Nigeria. I had been in Port Harcourt about one year

and needed to go back to the US for a few weeks. I left some money with the young man who was assisting me and told him exactly what to spend it for. I had no reason to question his honesty, so I was sure he would do exactly what I had told him to do with the money and nothing else. When I got back, all of my money was gone but my assistant had kept a very careful record of the expenses. There was no attempt to conceal or hide anything. Uncle John came by, and he gave him 20 Naira for transportation. Brother Samuel’s auntie died, and he sent her 100 Naira. A student had his bicycle stolen, so he helped him with a gift. Another student came by who was hungry, and he got a contribution. None of this was in my budget. However, for my assistant, who had access to money, it would have been immoral not to use that money to help meet the needs of those people who came into his life at that time.

I must clarify that just as there is not one worldview in the “world,” there is also not just one “Christian” worldview. There are different worldviews found even in the New Testament. Most of the Jewish Christians believed in order to really please God, one had to be circumcised and observe other aspects of the Mosaic Law. The typical Gentile believer knew little about the Mosaic Law and did not view circumcision that way. In Romans 14, Paul describes how various Christians can be united even though they have different worldviews. Some felt strongly about observing the Sabbath day. Others did not believe in eating meat. Paul did not try to correct either group. He recognized there is a certain amount of flexibility in creating our worldview, and not everyone will see things exactly alike.

One way of looking at a worldview is to compare it to the spokes of a wheel. Picture an old-fashioned wagon wheel that has a hub in the middle and spokes that lead to a rim on the outside.

- The hub of that wheel is a pure Christian worldview.
- The rim of that wheel is a pure non-Christian worldview.
- We as Christians are like the spokes of that wheel.

When we are unbelievers, we are sometimes as far away from Christ as possible. In fact, in some cases we are even further apart from others. A person raised in a western country, even if he is not a practicing Christian, has been influenced by Christian view point and is far away from a Buddhist worldview that would be on the other side of the hub. However, as we are drawn closer to Christ, we come closer to one another and often become closer to one another than we are to our own people. We may start at the outer rim of wheel. However, we start migrating toward the center. The people on the other side of the rim are also migrating toward the center. If we continue moving in the right direction,

## Insert, p.3, Contact

we will soon be closer to those who are coming from the other side than we are to “our own people.”

This is what Paul meant when he said, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10). The phrase *in Christ*, which is used dozens of times in the New Testament, implies that we have moved close enough to the center that we are somehow identified with Christ. The believers were first called Christians in Antioch. Why? They were called Christians because they got closer to the hub than they were to the rim. Therefore, they were more identified with Christ than they were with their former way of life.

That outer rim of the spoke reflects the things that we have retained from our family, our culture, and our ethnic group. The closer we get to the center of the spoke, the more we are like Christ. And the closer we get to Christ, the closer we get to one another. The closer we get to Christ, the more we think like Christ, and the less we think like our culture.

It is unlikely that any of us will ever come exactly to the center and be totally identified with Christ. We will always be on one side of the spoke or the other. However, it is our goal in life to get as close to that center as possible.

### Worldliness

The proper Biblical word for this normal, natural way of thinking is “worldliness.” In my background, we tended to look at worldliness as doing specific carnal things like going to dances, smoking cigarettes, and dressing like the world. We Christians indeed should stay away from sinful practices, however, it is now clear to me that worldliness is primarily thinking like the world.

- You can dress very plain and simple and still have a worldly way of thinking.
- You can reject today’s entertainment and still have a materialistic worldview.
- You can withdraw from the world and still be a proud and arrogant person.

Note these verses related to the world:

*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as **worldly**—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are **still worldly**. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? **Are you not acting like mere men?** (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).*

The Corinthian Christians were still thinking the same way they were before they became followers of Jesus. They were mere “infants in Christ.” They were still jealous—thinking about themselves and quarreling—failing to understand or appreciate the

thinking and dignity of others. These things demonstrated that they were still “worldly.” They still had a non-Christian worldview.

*Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to **worldly wisdom** but according to God’s grace (2 Corinthians 1:12).*

Here Paul talks about the concept of “worldly wisdom,” which is simply thinking like the world—thinking in the traditional worldview of one who is not a Christian believer.

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17).*

John warns here against loving the world. He then tells us what the world is: “the cravings of the sinful man,” “the lust of his eyes” and “the boasting of what he has and does.”

These are some of the types of things that motivate the average or natural man.

- He craves after material things.
- He desires things that will please his eyes.
- He boasts about his accomplishment so that people will respect him.

Worldliness and a non-Christian worldview are synonymous. Godliness and a Christian worldview are also synonymous.

### Key Issues in the Conflict

In every battle there are key points that are being contested. For example, in our Jos Crisis, there are several issues.

- Religious issue. Christianity and Islam are contesting for adherents to their faiths.
- Political issue. Various politicians are trying to attain various government offices.
- Settler-indigene problem. The indigenes believe they are the owners of the land and should have priority in its resources. The settlers believe that they should have equal treatment since they have helped to build up the land.

What are the key differences of thinking between the way followers of Christ think and the way the rest of the world thinks?

### General Issues

There are some issues that are characteristic of human nature the world over. And these are the

## Insert, p.4, *Contact*

kinds of things that influence our worldview. I will only mention two.

***The non-Christian worldview focuses on material things. The Christian worldview focuses on spiritual things.***

The typical non-Christian views success in life as the accumulation of material things. Why do people steal? They steal so they can have material things. Somehow they believe that these possessions will make them happy. Why do some people work all the time? They often work excessively for exactly the same reason. They want to accumulate things that they believe will somehow make them happy.

The typical focus of “the world” is to get all you can. The typical person will take great risks to try to accumulate material possessions.

- Armed robbers risk their lives to get material possessions.
- People will take very dangerous jobs to make a little money.
- Family members destroy their relationship with other family members over inheritance issues.

This way of thinking has even penetrated Christianity to some extent. Many of our preachers spend a whole lot of their time preaching on material things and promising the faithful that God is going to give them “breakthroughs” that will somehow make them rich. And the underlying worldview is that these material things will make them happy.

Have you notice what gets us excited when our preachers are preaching? When the preacher talks about commitment and holiness and drawing close to God, we will have little “Amen’s.” However, when the preacher starts talking about “achieving your destiny” or “getting your portion” we stand to our feet and cheer. That gives us some idea about the nature to which materialism has penetrated even the church and the pulpit.

Notice these amazing teachings of Jesus.

*I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23-24).*

*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mark 8:34-35).*

Some time ago, I did a study of prosperity in the Bible. I discovered that for every positive reference to wealth in the New Testament there were ten negative references. That means the New Testament writers recognized that the world was going to be focusing on wealth. Therefore, they warned against it. It is interesting that in many of our churches we have

10 positive references to wealth for every negative statement. Why is that? It is because we have been influenced by worldly materialistic way of thinking.

The focus of Jesus and the New Testament was:

- Giving not getting
- Sharing not hoarding
- Simplicity not extravagance
- Blessing not being blessed

This tendency toward materialism manifests itself two different ways. In the western world, Christians spend a lot of money on material things. Christians live very comfortable lives. They make a lot of money so they spend it on things to make them comfortable and respectable. Christians even borrow great amounts of money and spend the rest of their lives trying to get out of debt so they can have more and more material things. Few Christians spend a lot of time thinking about the theology of wealth.

In Nigeria, the focus is a bit different. We do not have as much wealth in the general population. And we do not have the ability to borrow as easily. Therefore, the manifestation is not so much on accumulation of material things as on the “love of money.” People are in love with the idea of being rich.

- We talk about it.
- We pray about it.
- We fantasize about it.
- We even preach about it.
- We claim it as a divine right.

Here is Paul’s perspective on material things:

*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).*

Have you been infected with the worldly concept of materialism? Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.” To the extent that we think about money and wealth and accumulating things, to that extent we are still infected by a non-Christian worldview. To the extent we think about worship and service and meeting the needs of others, to that extent we have developed a worldview patterned after Christ.

***The non-Christian worldview focuses on recognition (pride). The Christian worldview focuses on humility.***

One of the universal characteristics of humanity is that we want recognition.

- We want to be admired.

## Insert, p.5, *Contact*

- We want people to notice us.
- We want to be invited to the high table.

Someone has said that the sweetest music that we will ever hear is our name being called in public. Look around you just about anywhere and you will see pride.

When I lived in Port Harcourt, I was at my neighbor's house one day. A preacher came to see him. Though this preacher was a very big, fat man, he was very proud of himself. In those days, very few preachers could afford a vehicle. However, this man had managed to get a vehicle. And this preacher enjoyed sitting in the owner's corner, which of course is in the back seat on the right side. When it was time for this man to go, I watched with great interest as he struggled and struggled to get in the back seat, right side of his two-door Volkswagen beetle. His pride was actually making him look foolish.

There is nothing wrong with being respected. However, there is a very thin line between the desire for respect and being proud. The Bible recognizes this and repeatedly warns against pride.

- Proverbs 6:16-17 tells about seven things that God hates. "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes . . ." The KJV translates this "a proud look."
- Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Pride manifests itself in many different ways:

- We express our pride in the way we dress.
- We express our pride in where we sit in our meetings.
- We express our pride in the kind of people we wish to be associated with.

Our pride is designed to make us look and feel important. When people say nice things about us, then we get a good feeling.

However, God's desire for us is the path of humility. John the Baptist said, "He (Jesus) must increase and I must decrease." Paul said in Romans 12:10: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." Humility is contrary to the way the world thinks. The world believes that if you do not promote yourself, no one else will promote you.

This has sometimes made me wonder if a truly practicing Christian could be a politician in the mold of modern politicians. To get elected into office, politicians have to say good things about themselves and bad things about their opponents. And this is contrary to the principle of humility taught in the scripture. This means that truly Christian politicians

will be very different in the way they approach their political appointments.

We must be very careful and not allow ourselves to be inflicted with the pride of this world. We must focus on humility. Proverbs 11:2 says: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Have you been infected by the world's disease of pride? Pray that God will deliver you from that kind of thinking and give you the mind of humility.

### **Culture-Specific Issues**

Worldview is a culture specific thing. Let me give some examples from both the western world and Africa about how our culture influences our thinking.

***Western Issue: The non-Christian worldview focuses on the rational. The Christian worldview focuses on faith.***

About 500 years ago, the western world began to discover that many of the things they had believed were not true—such as the fact that the world is round rather than flat. This encouraged western scholars to start measuring all education and information by whether or not it was rational. In other words, were the things we believe consistent with logic and human reasoning? That philosophy of life has gradually developed until the Western world, to a large extent, is almost totally rationalistic. That means that the western world finds it difficult to believe anything that is contrary to reason.

- We cannot see or feel or touch or understand demons. Therefore, "demons" are purely imaginary and a part of our old superstitions.
- Miracles are contrary to reason. Therefore, all these things people call miracles are just excited imagination or blind faith.

If these things are true, then that has a bearing on our faith. If there is no such thing as a miracle, then the miracles that are described in the Bible did not occur either. And if you take away the miracles from the Bible, you have very little of significance left.

This philosophy has even penetrated Christianity. Even 100 years ago, the missionaries who came and planted Christianity in Africa, had already been influenced to some extent by rationalism. Many of the early missionaries even played down the significance of demons and evil spirits, attributing many of those things to superstition. The early missionaries, who would have philosophically accepted miracles, and certainly would have accepted all the miracles of the Bible, were so influenced by rationalism, that they did not expect too many supernatural miracles in their lives. Therefore, this rationalistic kind of Christianity is the kind of Christianity that was planted in Africa.

However, the Bible says, "The just shall live by faith." In fact the Bible says that "without faith, it is

## Insert, p.6, Contact

impossible to please God.” Hebrews 11:1 declares, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Fortunately, the typical African worldview does not have any problem with miracles. Therefore, African Christians do not have problems with miracles. In fact, the more that Africans have taken over the churches and the more of the western influence that has been replaced, the more we are seeing a return to an emphasis on the miraculous in Christianity. Why is this? Because the African worldview has never had any problem and still does not have any problem with believing the supernatural.

Let me make this one final comment: I challenge you to be careful about the creeping western philosophy of rationalism in Africa. It is coming and, in fact, is among us. You must be aware of it. Christians should be thoughtful people who are constantly seeking for the truth and certainly do not want to be unreasonable. However, we do not want to give up the fact that God can and does miracles. Do not allow western education or western media or western philosophy or even western Christianity to erode your faith in God to do the miraculous.

***Nigerian Issue: The non-Christian worldview focuses on retaliation. The Christian worldview focuses on forgiveness.***

The normal way to respond to an offense is to retaliate. The Old Testament philosophy of justice included personal retaliation for an offense. It was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and a broken bone for a broken bone. In other words, that which a person did to me, I was entitled to do that same thing to him. And that might be considered natural justice. If you beat a dog, that dog will bite you back.

There is little I can say to Africans about this kind of justice. For hundreds of years, your ancestors fought wars against neighboring tribes, almost always in retaliation for some offense. Perhaps the original grievance can no longer even be remembered. However, in responding to the original injury, someone went to the neighboring village and killed someone. That village went back to the attacker’s village and killed someone else. The people in that village responded again and this has gone on for hundreds of years. There have been hundreds and probably thousands of wars fought based upon the principle of retaliation.

Unfortunately, many of us participate in this on a much smaller scale.

- When someone pulls his vehicle in front of your vehicle, you overtake him and try to force him off the road.
- Someone shouts at you, you shout back.
- Someone gives you an obscene gesture, you respond in kind.

However, Jesus changed the rules and raised the standards for his followers.

*You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you (Matthew 5:38-42).*

In this passage, Jesus removed the right of retaliation. In fact, Jesus has raised the standard. We are to respond to acts of unkindness and evil with kindness and generosity. Jesus even raises the standard higher in the next verses.

*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).*

It is not natural to love your enemy. However, that is what Jesus taught us to do.

During the last few months in Jos, I have heard many reasons why we should deal decisively with our enemies. I have lived in Nigeria for the past 22 years. I have experienced three very serious Christian-Muslim crises. A crisis like we experienced in Jos does tend to affect your thinking, especially when you are in the middle of the crisis. However, regardless of our emotional reaction to these things, we must always come back to the Scripture and allow the scripture to be our guide. To respond to violence with violence is the way the world does things and not the way Jesus taught and demonstrated.

Unfortunately, this traditional retaliation worldview has penetrated the church. Many pastors are looking the other way when their youths go out into the community and kill and destroy. Why are they doing this? They are doing this because the traditional worldview is stronger than the worldview they have absorbed from Jesus.

Have you been guilty of responding to your enemies in a “worldly way?” Does your worldview still contain a heavy emphasis on retaliation from your old life?

### **Key Weapons in the Conflict**

How does one change a worldview? The worldview is imperceptibly developed when one is a child. One does not even know he is developing a worldview, but it slowly happens. Six-year old children have

## Insert, p.7, *Contact*

already developed a worldview that will be a part of them for the rest of their lives unless something happens to change their way of thinking.

The key word is change. To change our worldview, we must change our way of thinking. But how does this happen? How can one change? Obviously, this is somewhere near the heart of the gospel.

- When we repent, we change directions.
- Even after we are Christians we continue to change.

Ultimately, we believe that it is God who must change us. We really have only a limited ability to change ourselves. However, there are some things that we can do that will demonstrate that we have the faith for God to work his will out in our lives. These are the things that I will now focus on.

We see some answers of the ongoing transformation in worldview that Christians experience just weeks after Pentecost when we are given a summary of the new church.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).*

What were the things these new Christian believers were doing that were changing their orientation? They appear to be the same kinds of things that we need to do if we are to change our worldview.

### **We must change our religious education.**

Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' **teaching.**" Teaching is transferring information from one person to another. Formal teaching is making a deliberate effort to do so. It is obvious that in the early church period, the church was making a deliberate effort to teach the new believers the things that would help them develop what we now call a Christian worldview.

Since this is a conference of educators who will be focusing on this throughout the conference, I will not say much about this point. However, I will make some brief points.

***The education was a priority.*** This was something that they devoted themselves to. And, in fact, this is the first thing in the list of several things that they did to influence the way of thinking of the new believers.

***The education was deliberate.*** You can teach silently or passively. However, this is not what the

church was doing. They apparently organized seminars or whatever they called them in those days to have some kind of formal opportunity to convey new information to the believers. If we are going to help develop a Christian worldview in our people, we are going to have to make a deliberate effort to overcome what has been taught passively to our people.

***The education was continuous.*** The impression you get is that Peter and James did not stand up and give one lecture on what it meant to be a Christian. This was something that continued from the point of their conversion for the rest of their lives. When Jesus gave his Great Commission, one of the most important statements in that declaration was "teaching them to observe everything." The word "teaching" is a present tense participle, implying that this would be something that would be ongoing in the lives of the believers.

***The education involved correcting prior knowledge.*** Those who are teaching in primary school are sometimes teaching students new things—things that they have not learned. These children are often described as "blank blackboards" or "dry sponges" soaking up the new information. However, those who teach at the secondary school level and certainly at the tertiary level often have to correct things that have already been taught. Therefore, your goal is to change their thinking and their orientation.

Education is not just about teaching people things they do not know. It is about change. This is particularly true in Christian education. We must "unlearn" students many things before we can teach them the truth.

I challenge those who are part of Christian institutions to make sure you are not only teaching things students do not know but you are correcting the things they are believing and practicing that are wrong. It is true that sometimes we have students from other religions who attend our schools. There is nothing wrong with that, but the parents of those students should know what kind of worldview characterizes the institution. If God has called you to teach in a Christian institution, do not be shy about teaching a Christian worldview and correcting in the minds of your students those incorrect things they have learned in the past.

### **We must change our spiritual orientation.**

To have a truly Christian worldview, we must change the way we understand and view and practice the spiritual part of our nature. The summary passage in Acts points out two specific things the church was doing that will affect one's worldview.

#### ***Worship Orientation***

Note these statements:

## Insert, p.8, *Contact*

- They were meeting together for prayer; “They devoted themselves to . . . the breaking of bread and to prayer” (2:42).
- “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts” (2:46). What were they doing in the Temple? They went to the temple to worship God.
- “Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (2:47). They were meeting together to praise the Lord which is an important ingredient to worship.

What these statements suggest is that these new Christian believers were getting a new perspective on what it means to worship God.

These people were all Jews. They had a good idea of who God was. The Jews really knew how to worship at one time. When you read through the psalms, some of which were written almost a thousand years earlier, you will know that the Jews had known how to worship God. However, their worship had degenerated into mere ritualism over the centuries. Their worship was now largely reduced to going to the synagogue, listening to the Law being read, and listening to the rabbi speak. The ultimate form of worship was to go to Temple in Jerusalem where they would get a priest to make a sacrifice for them, but that experience often did not do much for the soul.

Fortunately, God had planned that a new form of worship was coming. The prophet Joel had predicted a time was coming when a new form of worship would be available to the world:

*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).*

What this passage suggests is that a time was coming in the future when the ultimate worship—experiencing God like only the priests and prophets and other great men of God had enjoyed, was going to become the experience of the common man. Peter tells us that this was the experience that began on the Day of Pentecost. So these believers, who had come to Christ on the Day of Pentecost and afterwards, were experiencing a new form of worship.

Jesus had hinted at something similar when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. She had asked him about the true place of worship. That was characteristic of their worship. They were focusing on places and rituals. However, Jesus made this amazing statement:

*Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is*

*coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:21-24).*

What Jesus was saying is that God wanted to restore and enhance real worship—the worship that is possible only when one has a spirit that is alive to God.

The first step in this kind of worship is what we call regeneration or, in more popular language, being “born again.” The new birth is that time, when after one has properly repented of sins, the Holy Spirit comes into his or her life and revives the spirit which has been dead to God. The spirit is the means through which one communicates with God. Because of sin, that spirit had been cut off from God or been “dead.” Now that the spirit is alive to God, one can now interact with God. And Jesus says here that those who really want to worship God must worship “in spirit.” In other words, they must worship not just in a specific place or with specific rituals, but they must worship with a resurrected spirit.

I am convinced one of the things that will change you the most and one of the things that will help to create a genuine Christian worldview is to experience real Christian worship. Experience God in worship once and your worldview will be changed. Continue to experience real worship on a regular basis and your worldview will continue to change.

There is no particular way in which worship is done. I have worshipped God in a beautiful cathedral in Oxford while a robed choir sang the most beautiful music I had ever heard. During that time, my heart reached out and touched God. I have also worshipped when I was all alone in my church, sitting at the piano, playing hymns of the faith, until the tears flowed out of my eyes and my heart was lifted up in worship of God.

A couple of years ago, I was in Bauchi, speaking at the Protestant chapel of the university there. Only a few months before this time, the president of one of the Christian groups on campus had been killed by radical Muslims. One of the elders in the chapel had had his house burned within a few weeks of our service by a similar group. As I sat on the platform that morning and observed and participated in the worship in that chapel, I was overwhelmed. Here were people who had really suffered but their hearts were being lifted up in worship and praise to God that transcended anything the world could ever give them. The thought that came to my mind that morning was: “Islam does not have a chance.” They have nothing that can touch the heart like genuine Christian worship.

Earlier in my life, there was a debate among us young theological students about the best way to evangelize people. Should we bring unbelievers to the church

## Insert, p.9, *Contact*

and preach evangelistic sermons to them or should we evangelize them outside the church and then bring them to the church as believers? It always seemed to me to be a poor use of time to bring a few unbelievers to the church and then use that time to preach to them when 95 percent of the congregation were already believers and already knew those things.

However, I now see that these are not the only options. I now understand that our Christian worship is one of the best tools for evangelism. If unbelievers can come to our church services and see and experience genuine Christian worship, they will be attracted to it. That will be what encourages them to repent and become followers of Jesus. I am convinced that worship is one of the most important things that will change our orientation.

Pastors, we must make sure that our churches provide opportunities for genuine worship. Teachers, we must encourage our students to make sure they find churches that will allow them to experience genuine worship. When we experience divine worship, our worldview has to change.

### ***Supernatural Orientation***

There is another statement in this passage that suggests something else that changed their orientation. Acts 2:43 says: “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.” This verse suggests that these early believers were seeing and experiencing the supernatural power of God. The Day of Pentecost was characterized by three phenomena: the tongues of fire, the supernatural sound like wind, and the speaking of languages that they had never learned. These were truly amazing things.

The next story in Acts, after the brief summary referred to earlier, is about a lame man who had sat for many years at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. Peter and James came along and said, “Silver and gold have I none but such as I have, I give you. Rise and walk.” This man jumped to his feet and went leaping and shouting throughout the Temple.

These kinds of experiences changed their orientation.

- They knew that God was alive.
- They knew that God was interested in them.
- They knew that God was all powerful and could intervene in their problems.

And this gave them a new perspective on God. In fact, the summary says, “Everyone was filled with awe” because many wonders and miraculous signs were being done. I am convinced that there are few things that will change our orientation more quickly than experiencing the supernatural.

Once while pastoring a church in the US, we decided to start a Christian school. Some church members were lukewarm toward the idea but were willing to

give me as their pastor the opportunity to lead on this issue. At that time, the church was preparing for a building program, and they did not want to divert any of the money that would be used for that purpose to the school. Therefore, I suggested a compromise. We would not start the school until we had enough money to get the necessary facilities, and we would do so without hurting the church. We came up with a deadline of when we needed the money in order to be able to start school the next academic year. The deadline was a certain Friday. On Sunday morning, the treasurer of the church, Varnie Wilson, stood up in the morning service and indicated that he wanted to speak. He said, “All of you know I have not been very enthusiastic about this Christian school idea. However, as I have watched the money come in during the last few weeks, and particularly this last week, it has been a miracle. I want the church to know I am now absolutely, 100 percent committed to this project.” What had changed Varnie Wilson’s orientation on that issue? He had seen the supernatural hand of God in this project.

Here is a word of caution: We cannot and must not attempt to manipulate God on things like this. We can never force the hand of God to perform a miracle. We must not attempt to claim a miracle has taken place when one has not. We will lose credibility faster on that than anything else. If God gives a miracle, we will really rejoice. However, if God does not give us a miracle, we will still serve him, by faith, knowing he does all things well.

Do you want to have a real Christian worldview? I would encourage you to experience God in worship and really experience the supernatural power of God. Then you will indeed be well on your way toward developing a Christian worldview.

### **We must change our personal associations.**

The Acts record makes several interesting statements about relationships:

- 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship ...”
- 2:44: “All the believers were together and had everything in common.”
- 2:46: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts . . .”

These verses tell us that once these people met Christ, they had a radical change of relationships. And this change of relationships influenced the way they thought. Peter describes this same phenomenon when he says:

*For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that*

## Insert, p.10, *Contact*

*you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you* (1 Peter 4:3-4).

Paul says about those who come to Christ: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is why Peter says here that your old friends think it strange you do not do the same things you use to do with them.

My mother had a proverb she gave to us when we were tempted to keep bad company. She would say, “Birds of a feather flock together.” In other words, your life will tend to reflect the kinds of people you associate with.

- If you associate with good people, they will encourage you to do the right thing.
- If you associate with wicked people, they will encourage you to do the wrong thing.

Before I gave my life to Christ, I spent time with my unbelieving friends, and unfortunately, I talked just like them. I used God’s name in vain. I used coarse and vulgar language exactly like my friends. However, when I made a personal commitment to Christ, God changed my vocabulary. Shortly after that, I started attending a Christian school and did so for the next several years. Therefore, because my friends were completely all believers, I would go weeks and months without hearing any of that old vulgar language. Gradually these things were cleansed from my mind, and I even stopped thinking about them. However, after a few years, I started doing construction work. And those construction workers were very coarse and vulgar in their language. Unfortunately, after being around those men for a few weeks, those vulgar and coarse words started popping up in my mind in certain situations. Thankfully, I did not yield to the temptation of saying those things, but they were there once again. Why? They were there because of the kinds of people I was spending time with.

Obviously, God is not calling us to go live on an island by ourselves. We live in this world and should not attempt to withdraw from it. Otherwise, we will never be able to help the people of the world. However, we must remember that the people we spend time with will influence our thinking and will ultimately influence our worldview. If you want to have a Christian worldview, you need to make sure you are spending quality time with godly people.

### **We must change our daily actions.**

In addition to the things they were doing to and among themselves, there are hints that these believers had other changes in their lives. Acts 2:47 says, “The Lord added to the church those who were being saved.” How was the Lord doing that? Obviously, it is always God who draws people to himself. However, God normally uses people to do aid in this process. In another summary verse, we see

a stronger hint of this: “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). The point is that these new believers began to see their former friends and associates as people who needed what they needed, and they began to aggressively try to win them to their new faith. Ordinary people started doing amazing things.

- Philip went down to Samaria and started proclaiming the gospel there.
- Dorcas began to sew clothes for the needy around her.
- The young man Timothy abandoned his plans and joined Paul as an evangelist.
- The physician Luke gave up his medical career and joined the missionary team.

After meeting Jesus, all of these people got a new insight into the real needs of the world and started working to address those needs.

Here is the point: The more they worked in the real world and saw and experienced the real needs from God’s perspective, the more their worldview changed. Here is the record of Paul’s ministry in Athens:

*While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.* (Acts 16:16-17).

The KJV of this paragraph begins: “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” There was something about being exposed to this city and its paganism that stirred Paul differently than any other city. And this may have even changed his strategy just a bit. Yes, he did go on to the synagogue, as was his normal practice. However, he also started speaking in the market. And he went to a pagan debate society and preached there. The point is that Paul’s exposure to a new need or problem helped to reshape his thinking and, in some sense of the word, changed his worldview.

I know that there is a big debate in missions circles right now about the short-term missionary and particularly the “missionary tourist” who goes to the mission field for a couple of weeks. However, I am convinced that those two weeks of exposure to the real world—looking at life through different eyes, will help to change the way a person thinks.

If you want to develop a Christian worldview, do something different. Expose yourself to a new ministry that you have not known about before. Focus on the needs of people that you have not thought about before. This will have a powerful effect on the way you think and will help develop a new Christian worldview.

**We must change our inner contemplation.**

There is one other New Testament passage that shows another area of our lives that will help change our worldview. Paul declares in Romans 12:1-2:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Here Paul is warning about being conformed to the “pattern of this world.” That is another way of saying we should not continue with a non-Christian worldview.

However, on the positive side, Paul says that we must “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The word “transformed” here is the Greek word *metamorphoo*. This is a word that is used in biology or zoology. It is a word that is used for the change that takes place from the time that a living being is in the form of an egg. It hatches out of the egg and becomes a worm. It crawls around for a while and then spins a cocoon, remaining in a dormant condition for a while. It eventually comes out of the cocoon and becomes a beautiful butterfly. That whole process is known as metamorphosis. That is similar in some way to the process God wants us to experience. He wants us to gradually and radically change from one thing to something more beautiful and better.

Paul is very specific in the part of our being that must change.

- It is not our body that must be changed.
- It is not our emotions that must be changed.
- It is not our vision or our hearing that must be change.

It is our thinking. They were to be transformed “by the renewing of your minds.” Obviously, the whole purpose of this presentation is to talk about our thinking. However, there are some specific things we can do that will definitely affect our thinking.

Paul says in Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” This passage tells us that we do have a certain amount of control over our thinking. And Paul demands that we think about things that are positive and wholesome. To the extent that we continue to think on things that are pure and holy and wholesome and virtuous, to that extent, our worldview is going to be transformed into a worldview that is like Christ’s.

In the passage with which we began this presentation, Paul says, “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” (2 Corinthians 10:5). When I used to read this, I assumed that this was saying something like the Philippians passage was saying—that we must bring every waking thought and make it submissive to the will of God. However, as I studied this a bit more carefully a few months ago, I saw that this is actually saying something else. It is stating that we must bring every thought in the sense of every discipline or profession under the authority of Christ. In other words, if you are teaching math, you must study math until you can see how math glorifies God. If you are teaching administration or accounting or chemistry, you must study all of those disciplines and demonstrate to your students how God is glorified in those disciplines. Every thought of every discipline must be brought under the authority of God.

How do we do this? This is obviously the most important question in this presentation. How can we transform our thinking so that it is thinking that is pure and holy and under the authority of and obedience to Christ? I have already suggested things like the associations we have. Let me add two additional simple thoughts.

***We can change our thinking through reading.***

Reading is one of the greatest gifts your parents and teachers ever gave you.

- Reading can take you to places that you will never go.
- Reading can give you thoughts that you will never have otherwise.
- Reading can affect your emotions equally as well as oral communication.
- Reading can stimulate your imagination and creativity in a profound manner.

I would encourage you to get good books and read them. Reading exposes you to the best thoughts of other people, and as you interact with them, you will gradually be changed.

I was reared in Louisiana in a very racist “segregationist” atmosphere which I was a part of and defended until I was married. However, I read one book that completely changed my orientation about race. It was the book, *Let Justice Roll Down* by John Perkins. It forced me to look at the civil rights movement that was going on at that time through the eyes of a black man who obviously was a committed Christian. And that book began the process of slowly changing my worldview on the issue of race.

***We can change our thinking through meditation.***

The Psalmist declared, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his

## Insert, p.12, *Contact*

delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). Sixteen times in the Psalms alone, the psalmist talks about meditation. What is meditation? It is getting alone where you can think and reflect and create and process your thoughts about a given subject. Isaac went out into a field one evening to meditate and that was the time he saw his wife being brought for him (Genesis 24:63). As busy as Jesus was, he would find time to slip off into a mountain or other quiet place to spend time alone meditating.

In 1976, I discovered that there was a difference between having a quiet time and really meditating. The thing that turned this around for me was taking notes while I was reading the Bible and praying. Taking notes enhanced my concentration and opened up the Bible more clearly to me than anything else ever has.

I would encourage you to get a notebook and start spending time daily with the Lord, reading and thinking and recording the thoughts God gives to you. You will be amazed at the new insights that you will gain and you will also be surprised over the years to see how your viewpoint will change about various things simply from reading and meditating on the Bible.

The more you spend time with the Bible, unencumbered by any other document, the more you are going to be changed.

### **Conclusion**

Immersion means that you completely submerge yourself into something. Baptists believe in baptism by immersion. That means they completely submerge themselves in water so that every part of the body is covered by the water. We use the word in language learning as well. The best way to master a language is by immersion. That means that you go live in a place where nothing other than that language is being spoken. In that way, you are forced to learn the language. You go from not understanding and not communicating to doing so partially to being completely comfortable in that new language.

My daughter, Carmen, is getting her PhD in African languages and literature. She has immersed herself in Hausa culture and language. And now she speaks Hausa very well—well enough to be interviewed on the Voice of America Hausa section.

You learn a profession by immersion in it so that you change from being a novice to being a professional. You become gifted in sports or music through immersion.

This is the way we change ourselves into the image of Christ which is another way of talking about the worldview.

- We must immerse ourselves into God’s word.
- We must immerse ourselves into the worship of God.
- We must immerse ourselves in Christian friends and Christian activities.
- We must immerse ourselves in wholesome activities and Christian ministries.
- We must immerse our minds into thinking about the things of God in a wholesome way.

When we immerse ourselves in the things of God, we will gradually change our way of thinking and we will gradually develop a Christian worldview. Have you immersed yourself in Christ? Have you completely surrounded yourself with godly and positive and holy things?

Paul makes this powerful statement in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16:

*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" **But we have the mind of Christ.***

Do you have the mind of Christ? The mind of Christ is the Christian worldview.