

Worldview ~ Part 3

Psychology and Sociology

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“Why, of course I think that marriage should be between a man and a woman, but on the other hand I don’t think that we should discriminate.”

“No I’m certainly not in favor of killing little children before they’re born, but I don’t think we should take away a woman’s right to choose either.”

“My daughter? No, I don’t want my daughter on the front lines of combat, but don’t you think that if women are going to have equal rights with men, then they should have equal responsibilities?”

These comments are indicative of people who do not have a Biblical worldview. They may have been made by people who were trying to do what is right, but had not dug very deeply into God’s Word regarding the basics of man’s nature. They may have been said by people who are afraid of giving God control over all of their lives; or, maybe they just haven’t decided whether they fear God more than men. In any case, they are not thinking through basic concepts in the nature of man (psychology) and societal structure (sociology) from a Biblical perspective.

Comments like these also reflect uncertainty about vital issues. Dear home educating parent, if you show this kind of uncertainty as you are trying to train your children how to live in this world, your children will become confused. They will not be prepared to go into the world to preach, teach, and baptize.

Yet, we must have more than certainty. People whose only reaction to homosexual marriage is to say, “That’s disgusting!” are certain about what they believe, but they are not very helpful to anyone else. They don’t help clarify anyone’s thinking by expressing a purely emotional reaction. We must give our children more. We have to show them what the Scripture says and how they can explain it effectively to someone who doesn’t understand. That’s why we are writing this series.

In part 1 we wrote about a Biblical philosophy of life. In part 2 we discussed ethics (how we decide what is right) and biology (what is the origin of life). Here in part 3 we will look at psychology (the basic nature of man) and sociology (how society should be structured).

Psychology attempts to describe the soul and mind of man. Sociology deals with the structures found in groups of people such as the family. God’s Word speaks abundantly on both topics, and it should be no surprise to us that there is a conflict between what the secularists say and what God says.

When the non-Christian psychologist assumes evolution to be true, he has a difficult time explaining to us how we know who we are i.e., our self consciousness. He explains it as the sum total of all the electrical activity of the body, especially the brain. The total sensory activity of the body builds an awareness of self over time. Through a long trial and error process groups of people then work out systems of behavior that would help the “species” to progress (note the overlap with sociology). Behavior that does not help survival is then tagged as “wrong” or taboo. Individuals are taught to feel guilty when they violate those norms. The norms can change however, and individuals need to be shown how to eliminate the guilt they feel when they are adopting new behaviors.

The Christian has a very different view of who man is. God created man, putting within him a spirit that is able to communicate with God and have a sense of what He wants. Man has an inborn sense of right and wrong that can be further refined and directed by studying God’s Word. Man experiences real guilt when he violates God’s law. This guilt is real because it comes from violating a standard coming from a real God to a real mankind. This is distinguished from psychological guilt that is engendered by society and is not based on anything in the person himself or anything permanent.

The secular psychologist has a difficult time with the word *sin* because it assumes a whole range of things that he questions. To identify an act as sin assumes the ability of one human to look at the behavior of another human and say with certainty that person is completely responsible for his action and that the action violates an objective moral code that is just. He would say, “That’s impossible!”

The person thinking Biblically trusts the justice that is in God’s character. God says that it is wrong for a child to disrespect his parent, for example. So, when a Biblically thinking parent sees or hears his child do so, he immediately takes steps to cause the child to conform to that Biblical teaching. The non-Biblical thinker would tend to look for reasons why the child is behaving that way and attempt to reason with the child, thus convincing the child that it would be in his best interest to change his behavior. Morality, for the secularist, does not enter the picture unless that person narrowly defines *moral* to be whatever society says is right at the time.

The concept of mental illness has become an integral part of our thinking over the last 120 or so years. Whenever a story appears in the media about someone committing a particularly heinous crime, most people think that the person is mentally ill. Yet that concept is not clearly defined, and it is not accepted by many Bible teachers and Christian psychologists. Jay Adams writes, “Organic malfunctions affecting the brain that are caused by brain damage, tumors, gene inheritance, glandular or chemical disorders, validly may be termed mental illnesses. But at the same time a vast number of other human problems have been classified as mental illnesses for which there is no evidence that they have been engendered by disease or illness at all.” (Quoted in *Thinking Like a Christian*, by David Noebel, Brodman & Holman, copyright 2002, pg. 73)

When someone has a heart blockage and must slow down his physical activity, we do not say that the person is lazy. The brain can become sick just as the heart can, so we must consider that behavior problems could have a physical origin. However, man’s tendency is to rebel against God’s standards. This rebellious tendency shows itself in many people’s lives as various forms of

selfishness, pride, argumentativeness, and lust. These things lead to behavior that can be very destructive. The rebellion, however, does not originate with faulty chemistry of the organ that lies between your ears. It comes from your spirit that is disconnected from God.

There is no evidence to indicate that the typical murderer, rapist, or bank robber is mentally ill in the physical sense that Dr. Adams described above. There is a great deal of evidence to show that they (the psychological aspect) and their families (the sociological aspect) have not made a serious attempt to please God or to allow Him to direct their lives. They are, in short, bound by sin.

Another very important issue that the secular psychologist and the Christian look at differently is suffering. A few years ago I was driving a school bus on which I transported a seven-year-old boy with some behavior problems. I had told him to do some things on the bus that he did not want to do. He resisted and had to be disciplined by the school authorities. I found out that he had some major disruptions at home and that he and his parents were in counseling. One day his father came to meet my bus and he handed me a note with some explanation of the situation that he thought would help me to understand his son. He gave it to me with the comment that he was “trying to keep his son’s life as stress-free as possible.”

The secular psychologist tends to see the removal of stress, pain, anguish, and other kinds of suffering as a goal because he equates it with successful living. Paul Vitz says that this “selfist” psychology “trivializes life by claiming that suffering (and by implication even death) is without intrinsic meaning. Suffering is seen as some sort of absurdity, usually a man-made mistake which could have been avoided by the use of knowledge to gain control of the environment.” (*Thinking Like a Christian*, pg. 75)

The Bible teaches that suffering has a positive purpose in our lives. Hebrews 5:8 says that even Christ learned obedience through the things that He suffered in the flesh. Deuteronomy 8:3 teaches us that the children of Israel suffered in the wilderness so they would learn it is not by bread alone that we live, but by the Word of God. Suffering teaches us important lessons, and it is a normal part of life that has great meaning for the Christian. We do not seek to experience suffering or pain; but when it comes, we trust that the LORD will show us what He would have us learn.

In the area of sociology there is a stark difference between those who think Biblically and those who don’t. The former thinkers emphasize the individual whereas the latter emphasize the group. Christians talk about the individual’s ability to change himself and many others; whereas non-believers speak of the group as dominant. William Stanmeyer says, “If man’s behavior were somehow conditioned by genetic code or social externals, then no just judge could blame him for the evil he commits. But the scripture teaches unequivocally that God blamed Adam and Eve for succumbing to the temptation to disobedience and punished them accordingly.” (*Thinking Like a Christian*, pg. 94)

A Christian sociologist investigates the family, church, and civil government as being institutions that God created. He looks at the patterns that God established and teaches that we must return to those patterns. If we are to be fulfilled as people, we will have to function within the

parameters that God has set. Individuals must decide to return to those patterns, and they can do that with powerful and far-reaching effects on their own lives and the lives of their families and friends.

The non-Christian sociologist tends to see individuals as being helpless in the face of overwhelming pressure from society to behave according to its dictates. In just a few years it has become normal in mainline Western society to speak of homosexuals as a class of people whose rights should be protected. Just a few years ago such expressions would have been strange to most people. The media, universities, non-Christian politicians, and entertainers have talked and written so much about “gays” that many people think that a person *is* gay in the same way that he *is* Chinese, blonde, or right-handed. This contention has never been shown scientifically; yet because influential people promote it, it has become accepted in many quarters.

The Christian sociologist sees family as the cornerstone of society such that healthy families make for a healthy society. The basic structure and roles of its members are fixed. The non-Christian sees “family” as a term with a changeable definition.

The Christian sociologist sees the church as a very important institution in proclaiming sin and salvation. The awareness of sin keeps people focused on the direction they should go, and the offer of salvation by Grace gives them hope to do it. The non-Christian sociologist sees the church as a vehicle that the ruling class uses to keep the masses controlled (Marxist) or as a preserver of tradition that prevents scientists from bringing more progress (humanist).

The Christian sociologist sees the state as a God-ordained means to promote social order. The protection of private property and the enforcement of the rule of law are very important here. The non-Christian sociologist sees the state as the way to enforce the norms of the majority on the minority.

Dr. David Noebel says that “Christian sociology values both the individual and society. The individual is seen as capable of free choice, though alienated because of man’s decision to turn from God. Society also is seen as fallen and imperfect, as well as responsible for its decisions and attitudes. ...People are charged with the duty of protecting and directing the growth of societal institutions ordained by God, including family, state, and church.” (*Thinking Like a Christian*, pg. 100)

As you are discussing world events with your children, you can show them how these perspectives are seen in the reports that they will hear or see about those events. When you see biased statements, you can show them how they are biased. This will help them to understand how our Salvation is related to every part of life.