

# HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

## INTRODUCTION TO HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP: DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Adapted from the teachings of Dr. Victor Torres, Jr.

The biblical principle of **CITIZENSHIP** is of great importance to every believer.

The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote: “*For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Phil 3:20). This Bible verse reveals that all believers in Jesus Christ are no longer “citizens” of this world, but belong instead to a far greater eternal Kingdom.

The moment we are born again through faith in Christ, we are spiritually adopted as sons of God (Rom 8:15,16). Our citizenship is “conveyed” or *transferred* into God’s Kingdom, which is not of this world (Col 1:12,13). Just as spiritual adoption into God’s family has great implications for every believer, so does **heavenly citizenship**. Becoming a citizen of God’s Kingdom should impact every area of our life – including our understanding of who we are, and how we think and act. It should affect how we view the world around us and how we live our daily life.

How we view the world around us will greatly contribute to the daily choices we make. This is what is known as a **worldview**. All people everywhere have a worldview of one kind or another which is shaped by a wide variety of factors.

As Christians, a correct understanding of our citizenship in God’s Kingdom should be the primary shaping influence of our worldview. It is important for you as a leader to live in such a way that all can see that *you* are a citizen in God’s Kingdom. It is also important that you both *model* and *teach* this way of life to those whom you shepherd.

## GOD’S PERSPECTIVE

Your understanding of heavenly citizenship will affect your overall perspective: how you see things in relation to life, relationships and ministry. How you “see” life will then determine your actions. Your actions will determine your results. Your results will determine the effectiveness of your life and ministry. You see, it all begins with your perspective. So it is important to have the *correct* perspective.

Having God’s Kingdom perspective and walking in obedience to Him are two primary keys to fruitfulness in life and ministry.

To better understand heavenly citizenship and how it shapes our worldview, let us look at the life of Saul/Paul (stop now and read Acts Chapters 8, 9, 22, 26; Galatians Chapters 1, 2). The Bible reveals how a total change of his worldview brought about a complete change of Paul’s life and actions.

## **SAUL/PAUL’S DRAMATIC WORLDVIEW CHANGE**

Saul grew up in a very devout Jewish home. He was well instructed by his father and family in the Jewish customs and traditions. Saul went to Hebrew schools and was fully immersed in his Jewish culture.

When Saul became old enough, he joined a Jewish sect in Jerusalem known as the Pharisees. He excelled in all learning, and had great zeal for the forms and traditions of the Jews. As a matter of fact, the Jewish leaders saw so much promise in Saul as a leader that he was mentored by one of the great Rabbis of the day, Gamaliel.

Saul had been totally indoctrinated by his Jewish environment, so much so that he was blinded to any other way of thinking.

## **PATH OF DESTRUCTION**

Jewish prophets had foretold that one day a Messiah would come to deliver the Jewish people from their oppression. There were those in Saul’s day who were saying that a man, Jesus Christ, was that very Messiah or Savior. This Jesus was teaching about the Kingdom of God based upon love, forgiveness and acceptance of all people – not only Jews but also Gentiles. Many of the Jews began to receive Jesus and His teachings, and were leaving the traditions of the Synagogue and being baptized into Christianity.

When Saul heard about Jesus and these followers that were threatening what he believed and valued, he became enraged and sought to hunt them down and destroy them. Saul persecuted them, and eventually volunteered to go to the city of Damascus for the purpose of arresting Christians and putting them in jail.

## SAVED FROM HIMSELF

Saul's trip on the road to Damascus was to become the turning point of his life. While traveling, Saul and his companions encountered a sudden light from Heaven. It was so bright and powerful that they fell to the ground. A voice that only Saul could hear spoke out from the light, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?" Saul replied, "Who are you Lord?" The voice spoke again, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting."

**At this very instant Saul had a personal revelation** and knew beyond any doubt that what was happening was real. Suddenly, much of what he had known and believed throughout his life was now in doubt. The very One whom Saul had come to persecute would be the One who would save him from himself. Saul had received a personal revelation of Jesus Christ, and as a result Saul gave his life to follow this Savior, the Son of God.

## A BLINDING WORLDVIEW

Like Saul, every person who believes on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has had a type of "personal revelation". They have had the light of the truth of Jesus Christ revealed to them (2Cor 4:3-6), though perhaps not as dramatically as Saul's unique experience!

At salvation, our "spiritual blinders" are removed, and we can better see the truth of Jesus Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures (Eph 1:17-23). We also begin to see that, prior to our conversion, we did *what we thought was right*. But once the truth is revealed to us, we realize that much of what we thought was right was actually wrong!

There can be a great deal of difference between *the actual truth*, and what we once perceived as truth – a especially when the basis for what we thought was truth was the world and its blind philosophies. Our worldview was shaped one way before Christ; but it must be reshaped after we receive salvation through Christ.

The environment in which Saul grew up – his friends, teachers, culture, religion and even his family – contributed to a *mind-set* or *worldview* that prevented him from seeing the real truth. It took a personal revelation by God to begin to open the eyes of his understanding.

After Saul's initial conversion (his name was then changed to Paul), it was many years before he finally began his ministry. It is likely that during those years, Paul took time to sort out his beliefs. In order to be an obedient Christ-follower, Paul had to reject the false beliefs and practices in his life. He also had to learn, fully embrace and live by the new-found truths taught by Jesus Christ.

## **ALIGNING WITH THE TRUTH**

My prayer is that as you continue to study this teaching, you will recognize the truth from the Word of God. Then, take time to examine your life in light of the truth. If you have beliefs or practices that disagree with what is taught in the Bible, you must reject those things and replace them with the truth found in God's Word.

Almost all of us, before coming to Christ, developed false ideas, beliefs, philosophies or practices. They may have had their roots in emotional, familial, cultural, traditional or religious associations. But now, as a Christian, your beliefs or practices must line up with the truth of Jesus Christ and the entirety of the Word of God.

As a Christ-follower, it should always be a priority to become more like Him (Matt 10:24, 25; 1Pet 2:21; 1John 2:6). So any belief or practice in your life that is not holy, that does not conform to the Word of God, or that is causing you to be less like Christ, should be rejected (Eph 4:1; 1John 3:2,3).

God has called you to His service in the ministry because He desires for you to be a leader in His Church, the Bride of Christ (John 15:16; 2Tim 1:8-12). He also intends for you to daily be transformed more and more into His image (Rom 8:29; 2Cor 3:18) and shaped for His purposes. As with Paul, God has provided everything you need to enable you to be effective. God sees your desire to be faithful to Him and to the ministry to which you are called. *“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry”* (1Tim 1:12).

## OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

Let us read again the declaration made by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 3:20).

What a profound statement by Paul the apostle. Paul was declaring that the earth and all that it holds was not his home; his *citizenship* was in heaven! By making that declaration, Paul was saying that his view of the world and life now came from a **heavenly** or **Kingdom perspective**.

When we are born again, our spiritual *citizenship changes*. Just as our spiritual birth is from Heaven, so is our new-found citizenship. In order to ensure that we accurately view life as a heavenly citizen – with a Kingdom perspective – we need to examine what we believe and why we believe it. Let us now look more closely at this concept of our heavenly citizenship.

### CITIZENSHIP

Paul was a Roman citizen, and understood that being a native or adopted citizen of Rome included **rights, privileges and duties** that foreigners did not have (see Acts 16:37; 21:39; 22:28; 23:27).

But Paul wrote to the Philippian church about a **spiritual** citizenship (Phil 3:20). He wanted them to understand that just as the city of Philippi was a colony of Rome, so the church at Philippi was a *colony of Heaven*.

When we are born-again, by accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, our citizenship is changed from earth to Heaven. We are no longer just Asian, Indian, African, European, Spanish or American. We are first and foremost *Christians*. Our allegiance and loyalties are first as citizens of heaven. This new-found citizenship should take priority over every other earthly association.

The Bible reveals that at salvation:

- Our eyes were opened (2Cor 4:3-6);
- We went from darkness to light (2Cor 4:6; 1Pet 2:9);
- We were delivered from the power of Satan to the power of God (Col 1:13);

- We received forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7); and,
- We received an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:18).

As part of that spiritual inheritance, we went from being earthly citizens to becoming citizens of Heaven. As members of God's eternal Kingdom, we are to represent the King of Heaven wherever we go: *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us"* (2Cor 5:20).

Yes, we are citizens of Heaven – and even more, **ambassadors for our King, Jesus Christ!** As His ambassadors, we have also been given the **power and authority** which flows from the King of kings and Lord of lords (Matt 16:19; 28:18; Titus 2:15). This power and authority are given to us to carry out God's will, not our own.

## THE PROBLEM

But there can be a problem with our new-found citizenship. The Bible states, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2Cor 5:17). We are new creations who are now citizens of a heavenly kingdom. But the problem is that **we don't yet know or fully understand the rights, privileges and duties of our new citizenship!**

Therefore, because we do not understand our born-again citizenship, we continue to live by the former practices, traditions and culture of the land in which we were raised. These former practices are often in direct disobedience to the truths and high standards of our new King, Jesus Christ, and His Word.

Why is this so? And, more importantly, how can it be changed?

## OUR WORLDVIEW

Every human ever born develops some type of worldview. Our worldview is formed by many things, including: our education; our upbringing; the society and culture we live in; the books we read; the teachers we have; and our exposure to television, radio or the newspapers. For many people, their

worldview is simply something they have absorbed by continual contact with their **surrounding influences**.

Most people have not identified their worldview or their perceptions of how life should operate. They just live life day-to-day, not consciously or intentionally living out their particular worldview. Their worldview may be biblical or secular, or somewhere in between.

Sadly, much of our view of the world is shaped by people and circumstances around us which are often broken and darkened by sin. Thus, our worldview also becomes distorted and broken. Having this kind of view of the world can lead us to become deceived about many things.

When our thinking and beliefs have been shaped by “the world” – through vain philosophies, false religions and ungodliness – we end up with a worldly or **secular worldview** (Phil 3:17-19).

## WHY WE NEED TRANSFORMATION

The moment we are saved through faith in Christ, all our sins are forgiven (Col 1:14). The penalty for our sin was paid by the blood of Christ (Rom 3:24, 25). When we are forgiven, our sins are remembered by God no more (Heb 10:16, 17). Our past is viewed by God as completely pure and holy (1Cor 6:9-11).

But some of the *effects* of our sinful life prior to Christ can still remain with us. The Bible reveals that after salvation, we need further transformation of our heart and mind (2Cor 3:18; Heb 10:14; Rom 8:29; 12:1,2). This transformation will help us to think and act more like a follower of Christ, and to have a different, more godly worldview.

Our secular worldview often hinders us from recognizing or responding to the righteous standards of the Bible. We end up not living as a fruitful citizen of God’s Kingdom, or enjoying the benefits our new heavenly citizenship. We may continue to practice or believe things that contradict the Bible. Or we may choose to fall back into a sinful lifestyle.

Let us study a bit more about our worldview to discover why this often happens.

# YOU HAVE A WORLDVIEW

Everyone has a worldview. Your worldview consists of how you view and perceive many things – including relationships, family, work, government and religion. Your worldview influences all of your decisions and actions.

Since our worldview is so important to how we live – and do the work of the ministry – let us take a closer look at the meaning of “worldview”:

1. A worldview is the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world.
2. A worldview is a collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

Unfortunately, many are living a life which is inconsistent with a biblical view simply because they have been deceived by the many factors that can shape a worldview.

## DECEPTION

The nature of deception is sinister. The one who is deceived is often unaware that he or she is being deceived (2Tim 3:13). Every one of us has the potential for wickedness and deception in our heart (Jer 17:9). So we need a source of truth in order to check our heart.

God, in His wisdom, revealed Himself and His truth to us. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit inspired God’s servants to write down this truth. These writings have been preserved and passed down through the generations, and are known today as the Holy Bible. These holy Scriptures act as a compass to guide us to truth, and as a light which illuminates the truth (Ps 119:105).

**We must always examine what we believe and why we believe it against the Bible, the Word of God,** which reveals to us the truth. It is through this process of examination, with the Word of God as the standard, that we will discern deception and error from the truth.

If we never examine our values and beliefs, then we cannot be sure that what we believe is based upon truth. If we are not in truth, then we must be in deception or a lie.

This is the primary reason why many people eventually go astray: Instead of living by the wisdom and truth of God's Word, they live by the basic standards of the world. They are guided by an ungodly worldview, and their behavior reflects those beliefs.

Not only do they go astray, but then they lead others astray as well: *"And He spoke a parable to them: 'Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?'"* (Luke 6:39).

That is why the Bible cautions us to beware of the world's view of truth and life: *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ"* (Col 2:8).

Take some time to study the following selection of scriptures to gain a greater understanding of God's perspective on the "world" as opposed to His Kingdom truth: John 18:36; Romans 12:1,2; 1 Corinthians 3:18,19; 6:2; 7:31; Galatians 4:3; Colossians 2:20; James 4:4; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 2:15-17; 4:4,5.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOURSELF**

If the foundation of our life is built upon worldly philosophy, traditions of men and the ungodly principles of the world, we will not be able to build a house that will stand (Matt 7:24-27). Yet, even knowing this, an ungodly worldview is often something we are so comfortable with that we have a difficult time changing it.

Our worldview is shaped from birth, throughout our life experience, and becomes very much a part of us. That makes it difficult for us to see from a biblical or heavenly perspective. Thus, we see why the Bible stresses the importance of knowing yourself and accurately judging yourself: *"For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged"* (1Cor 11:31; see also Jeremiah 17:9, 10; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16).

Knowing yourself involves understanding why you have the positions, opinions, beliefs and perceptions that you have formed in life. Gaining understanding about why you see life the way you do will help you change any wrong perceptions that may be affecting your spiritual discernment.

This is especially important as it pertains to ministry leadership, since you have been entrusted to lead and care for the Bride of Christ. You have been

given influence over and responsibility for something that God loves very deeply: His Church, His people. You must be able to see truth clearly and to live by it in order to guide others in the truth.

## WHEN OUR WORLDVIEW BECOMES AN OBSTACLE

As we have learned, a worldview is the overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world. It is from this perspective that one makes decisions about how to live – and lead – in this world.

A worldview also includes the individual's beliefs about life and the universe. These beliefs impact their understanding of everything, including the Bible. Therefore, anything in one's worldview that obscures or interferes with the ability to see the truth must be dealt with.

As an example, the apostle Paul recognized in his own life how his love of the Law was an obstacle that blocked his view of seeing clearly the message of grace that Jesus brought (read 2 Corinthians 3:11-18).

## SEVEN “VEILS” THAT OBSCURE TRUTH

Our worldview is generally formed by seven major influences. For the purpose of this teaching, I will liken each influence to a veil. If we are not aware of the influence of the “veil” through which we often see, we may not realize why we do not clearly see the truth.

### 1. The “Veil” of our Sin Nature

The influence of our sin nature is subtle yet very strong. All human beings sin. *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Sin is often defined as missing the mark, a failure to live up to God's requirements. But the **reasons why** we fail to live up to God's righteous commands – sin – go much deeper. We choose to sin because every human being is born with a sin nature, a corrupt nature inherited from Adam. The result of one trespass (Adam's) was condemnation for all men: *“Therefore, as through one man's*

*offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom 5:18).*

## THE BATTLE AGAINST TEMPTATION

We are completely forgiven of our sins when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The *power* that sin once held in our life is also broken at salvation (Rom 6:5-11). We are given a new nature that is empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to resist sin and the devil (Rom 6:12-14; 8:1-8).

However, the effects of sin, or the pain of sinful choices, sometimes remain in our lives. This can influence our choices as a Christian. Further, even after salvation, we continue to experience temptation. There are times when the former desires of our flesh want to pull us back into sin (Romans Chapter 7; Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16-26; Jas 4:1-9).

Because of these factors, it is as if we have two natures within us that are at war with each other. Paul explained that, despite his best intentions, he was still at times influenced by his old sin nature: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom 7:18,19).*

The "veil" of our former sin nature and its unholy desires, when not confronted and overcome, can severely hinder our ability to see the truth and obey the Lord's commands.

Though we all must do battle against our fleshly nature and sinful desires, there is good news: **We can have victory** over the sin nature through the power of Christ by the Holy Spirit!

### 2. The "Veil" of Family

Some of the strongest influences that shape our thinking come from our family upbringing. The interaction (or lack of interaction) we have with parents, siblings and relatives are our earliest influences. These influences are strong because they form the earliest foundation of how we process information and experiences.

The Bible reveals the shaping power of our early familial influences: *“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”* (Prov 22:6).

The “training” that families give may be active or passive, intentional or accidental. Children can learn as much (or more) by what is modeled in the home as they can from what they are told. For instance, if parents pray regularly with their children, they are teaching the children that prayer is a priority, even if they don’t tell them that. Or, if parents are overly fearful of what might happen, they may be “teaching” the children to be fearful and insecure in life.

Many times, because children are young, they misunderstand what they see or hear and make wrong conclusions. These wrong conclusions then influence how they live or see life. The “veil” of a broken or unrighteous childhood upbringing can be deeply rooted and is often hard to recognize. It can even cause one to misperceive God and His ways.

For example, if an earthly father has been cruel or unloving, it might be very hard for that child to later believe that God the Father is kind and loving. Our earthly example often shapes our perceptions, or “worldview”. Oh, how we need the Holy Spirit’s work and the Word of God to deliver and heal us!

## **PASTOR TO PASTOR:**

I have a good friend who was raised with an abusive father. The father was untrustworthy, and often abandoned the family, leaving them with many needs unmet. When my friend finally came to salvation through Christ, he was thankful to learn of the forgiveness of sins and the restored possibility of relationship with his heavenly Father.

But as soon as my friend faced a serious trial, he became afraid to trust God. He thought that, like his earthly father, God had abandoned him and did not truly love him. My friend chose to not believe what the Bible revealed about God, but instead saw God through the “veil” of his childhood. He believed that God did not care about his needs and decided that God couldn’t be trusted.

Consequently, his “worldview” influenced him away from a trusting and submitted relationship with God. He fell back into his worldly ways. It was many years before he came to realize how a childhood “veil” had robbed him

of the relationship he could have enjoyed with God, and the blessings of believing and obeying God's Word.

### 3. The "Veil" of Education

Children are naïve and very easily influenced. As students, they often accept everything that they are taught as truth.

As a result, educational institutions have a strong influence on how individuals think and perceive things, especially how they view life and truth. *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience"*(Eph 5:6).

Most of us were taught things in school that do not align with the truth of the Word of God. These things shaped our worldview, and can distort our ability to see the truth and live by it.

As an example, many children are taught in school that the world was not created, but that it just "evolved". However, the Bible clearly states that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis Chapters 1 & 2; John 1:3).

Unfortunately, the worldview of accepting that there is no Creator can later hinder one from believing in God or accepting that He created them for a purpose.

### 4. The "Veil" of Peers

Our friends and associates are another source of influence for how we think about and view life. The enjoyment of a friendship often causes us to overlook the worldly attitudes, speech and behavior of our "friends". We start by tolerating, then accepting, and finally agreeing with them. As a result, we can become very much like them (Prov 12:26; 1Cor 5:11; 15:33).

We need to learn how to choose our friends and not allow our friends to choose us. Friends and associates have great power and influence over our lives. They have the potential to influence our view of life.

The Bible is very clear about associating with people who scoff at God or do not take God seriously: *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid*

*them*” (Rom 16:17; see also Proverbs 12:26; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Timothy 6:3-5).

## 5. The “Veil” of Culture

The cultural environment in which we grow up influences us in very subtle ways. There are cultures that believe in forgiveness and others that believe in vengeance; cultures that believe in marriage to one spouse (monogamy) and others that believe in multiple wives (polygamy); cultures that separate people and determine their worth by tribe, caste, gender or skin color, and others that believe in the equality of all people.

The list is long for the differences in cultures. Yet, as Christians, we are no longer subject to worldly cultural norms. The Bible is now our standard for behavior. The Scriptures teach that our citizenship is now in Heaven and our culture is a heavenly one of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit: *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Phil 3:20); *“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14:17).

If the practices of the culture we live in do not agree with the Word of God, we must be willing to cease from those cultural practices. All that we are and all that we do as Christians must agree with the whole counsel of the Word of God. This mindset takes priority over the beliefs or practices of our culture.

For instance, in some cultures it is considered a good thing to lie or cheat to gain something for yourself. But the Bible is very clear that a Christian is to neither lie nor take advantage of others (Eph 4:25; Col 3:9). So, in this case, the cultural worldview must change, and the behavior must change to conform to the standard of God’s Word.

## 6. The “Veil” of Tradition

Traditions are those activities and behaviors that are shared with others in our circle of relationship or community. They represent a way of routinely doing things within families, schools, friendships, cultures and churches. It is not uncommon to find that traditions are sometimes based in false religion or other forms of deception, worldliness or human invention. Even if they are common practices to us, they may be in contrast to biblical doctrines and teachings and must be addressed in our lives.

Some examples of these types of unbiblical traditions include: praying to the dead or praying to religious saints; participating in superstitions or unholy rituals; observing pagan celebrations.

Jesus clearly addressed those who chose their traditions over obeying the clear truths of the Word of God: *“For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men – the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’”* (Mark 7:8, 9; see also Colossians 2:16-23).

## 7. The “Veil” of Experience

Almost every person experiences seasons of opportunity and good fortune, as well as heart-wrenching tragedy and pain. It is at these times that we may draw conclusions about God and life, which may or may not be based on truth.

Each of us is shaped by these experiences and there is no predicting what our conclusion will be. Two individuals could both experience receiving great wealth; the wealth destroys one while that same wealth produces a generous spirit in the other. Two individuals could experience a terrible tragedy; in one it leads to despair and hopelessness, and in the other individual it produces a determination to overcome and to not give up.

It is important to understand that these types of life experiences heavily influence our worldview. Our own misunderstandings about God’s role in the midst of hurtful situations may have negatively influenced our view of God. The worldview we embraced in such times must be evaluated freshly in the light of the truth of the Word of God.

## PASTOR TO PASTOR:

If we, or the people in our churches, have embraced thoughts or practices that are contrary to the Bible’s revelation of God or His purposes in this life, we must prayerfully examine those ideas. We may need the Lord’s healing touch regarding:

- healing from a traumatic loss or other experience;

- deliverance from fear;
- a new-found assurance that God is trustworthy;
- a readjustment in our thinking about God's provision for our needs; or,
- other possible effects from challenges or trials.

During your times of daily prayer, ask the Lord to show you if you have a "veil" from your past experiences that is blocking you from seeing Him as He truly is.

## **FREEDOM FROM WORLDVIEW BONDAGE**

These "veils" and other influences shape our perspective. They contribute to our "worldview", which affects the choices we make in life.

If we have adopted a worldview based upon the world's systems or ungodly principles, how can we accurately represent the Kingdom of God? **How can God bless that which He does not approve of?** Thank God that He has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth to us, and to truly set us free!

## **AM I BLIND OR CAN I SEE?**

So, then, we must ask ourselves: Is what I believe about life based upon truth as revealed by God through His Word, or upon a false worldview? Am I blinded to the truth by my worldview, or do I clearly see? **Is the worldview that I have biblically based?**

The Bible reveals to us that the power of the Gospel is able to open our eyes, and move us from the darkness of Satan's power to the light of God and His glorious inheritance (Acts 26:17,18). But we must also be continually transformed (2Cor 3:18), and allow ourselves to be purified and cleansed of anything that we practice or believe that is distorted, unholy or not based on God's truth.

## **PASTOR TO PASTOR:**

As pastors and leaders, we will be held to a higher level of accountability before God for our words, actions and decisions. *"My brethren, let not many of*

*you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (Jas 3:1). We must continually strive to accurately represent Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the whole counsel of the Word of God, to those we lead. **We must teach the truth; we must live the truth.***

This is achieved by opening our heart to examination by the Word of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit every day. We must yield to the ongoing, transforming work of God that is vital for **every** believer (Rom 12:1,2). We must respond to the truth, believe it and act upon it (Jas 1:22).

## **IGNORANCE IS NOT AN EXCUSE**

There will be no acceptable excuse for teaching error (Jas 3:1). Therefore, we must be very certain that what we preach and teach is truth.

*Jesus says, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31, 32). If the truth will set us free, then conversely a lie will put us into bondage. Bondage is not of God, for Jesus came so that the chains of bondage would be broken and we would be set free (Luke 4:18,19).*

Ignorance of the truth will not be accepted as an excuse for not representing the truth to God’s people and the world (1Cor 10:1; 12:1). Whether a lie was intentional or unintentional, the result is the same. This is because any lie, even when spoken in ignorance, still has the same effect: death (John 8:42-47; 10:10).

The Word of God (the Bible) and the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Truth) were given so that we would know the truth and that the truth would set us free. They are able to continuously transform us, freeing us from ungodly worldviews that want to hinder our clear understanding of truth. We must study the Word of God daily and be responsive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit in order to know and live out the truth. That freedom and knowledge of the truth will then enable us to preach, teach and minister with confidence, boldness and courage.

## **LIFE EXPERIENCE VS. THE WORD OF GOD**

There are times when our life experiences have led us to form improper conclusions that are contrary to the Word of God. The result can be relying on our human understanding instead of placing our full trust in God and His Word (Prov 3:5,6). This can lead to wrong choices, which have long-lasting consequences for us and for the people we lead.

The Bible gives a clear example of this (Gen 15:1–17:21). God told Abraham and Sarah that they would have a natural-born son (15:4-6). Sarah became impatient, and did not hold fast to what God had promised. Instead, she relied on her own human idea and offered her maid to Abraham (a common practice of that day).

Indeed, her maid bore Abraham a son, but it was a son born out of disobedience and disbelief in God's Word (16:1-4) and it caused much heartache (16:12). This son, Ishmael, and his descendants are the forefathers of the Arabic peoples. Centuries of bloodshed and warfare between Ishmael's descendants and the people of Israel have been the result.

As pastors and leaders, we must resolve that **experience must never replace the Word of God** as our foundation of truth. Our circumstances can never be the source of our decisions. **The Bible is our only source for what is true!** The Bible is God's revelation and wisdom revealed to mankind. No matter what situation you face, the Bible has the answer of truth for you. (You can read more about the importance of the Word of God later in this article.)

## **GOD IS WITH US**

Some experiences in life can be confusing. We often have difficulty discerning the source of a trial. Are we being tempted or tested (Jas 1:2-18)? Is the trial from God, Satan, or just a trial of my own flesh? We may wonder why we are going through a difficult time.

Some of the most difficult lessons are born out of the uncertainties of life. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, and it does not seem that justice prevails. While a just end to a circumstance may not be realized in this life, as Christians we still have the assurance that God is for us (Rom 8:31) and that justice will certainly prevail in the end (Gal 6:7).

Difficult circumstances, natural disasters or tragedies may lead us to think that God is the author of these events. But we must remember that we live in a

world that is broken by sin and still under the influence of Satan (1John 5:19). Mankind's rejection of God and His ways, coupled with man's sinful choices, have resulted in a world of suffering and pain, a world where "the rain falls on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45).

It is impossible to know or understand all that we would **like** to know about this life, or about God and His ways. But we can rest in the fact that everything we **need** to know for life and godliness has been made available to us through Jesus Christ: *"As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue"* (2 Peter 1:3).

We cannot know everything that God knows. He is so much greater and wiser than we could ever be. God's thoughts and ways are far beyond our thoughts and ways: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'"* (Isa 55:8, 9).

So when things take place that we cannot understand, we have an opportunity to mature as a disciple of Christ. We can choose at these times to walk by faith and place our trust in God. *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2Cor 5:7; see also Hebrews 11). We must remember that no trial or difficulty, no pain or challenge – absolutely **nothing** can separate us from God or His love (Rom 8:37-39). We can call upon Him in our hour of trial, and know that He will hear us and answer in His way and time.

## THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

Experiences are often accompanied by strong emotions or feelings. But, as you know, emotions and feelings can often be very misleading. They are not predictable, and can change from day to day. Our feelings cannot be trusted to lead us to truth.

Two people can have the same experience and yet come to totally opposite conclusions based upon their feelings or responses. Each person responds in a unique way, even to the same circumstances. As a result, each person develops their own unique view of the world. That worldview may be based upon truth, or not. But it is certainly formed in part by the experiences of the individual.

Our life experiences can be influenced by many sources, including:

## THE INFLUENCE OF GOD

Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, it is clear that God has a purpose and plan for people: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jer 29:11). While God never violates our free will to make choices, He certainly can be involved in the circumstances of our lives: *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way”* (Ps 37:23).

Even if God is not the cause of a circumstance, He can still use it for our good. As we mature as sons and daughters of God, we can more readily recognize when He is at work in our circumstances. Then we can wholeheartedly respond to the Spirit’s work, and allow Him to use the circumstance to transform us more into Christ’s image (Rom 8:28,29).

## THE INFLUENCE OF SATAN

The enemy of your soul, Satan, comes to steal, kill and destroy. But thank God that Jesus came to give life, and life more abundantly! (John 10:10)

The devil does not want you to experience the life and freedom that Christ gives. Satan has many ways to attempt to lead people astray. But one of the greatest tools of the devil is deception.

The devil uses deception and lies to try to create **doubt** in your mind about the goodness and faithfulness of God. Satan will try to use experiences or temptations in order to weaken your faith in God, or to cause you to disbelieve God’s promises and walk away from relationship with Him.

Let us review a few scriptures that reveal some of Satan’s methods to lead us astray:

- *“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Mark 13:22).
- *“Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices”* (2Cor 2:11).

- *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2Cor 11:3).*
- *“And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14).*
- *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pet 5:8).*

But **you are not a helpless victim of Satan**. You are a child of God, who has been well equipped to resist the works of the devil! *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11).* We have a sure defense against Satan. We must put our trust in the Word of God and, more importantly, put our trust in the **Author** of that Word, Jesus Christ. Each time we obey God, we are strengthened in our spirit. This helps us to resist the devil, who then must flee from us (Jas 4:7).

## THE INFLUENCE OF PEOPLE

The Scriptures teach that although we are **in** the world, we are not to be **of** the world (1Cor 2:12; 1John 2:15-17). This means that we are to maintain our unique Christian perspective in thoughts and actions. We are to live as citizens of a higher Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven. The laws of God’s Kingdom are to be what rule and guide our behavior.

We are not to be led or influenced by the society around us. We must mature and grow stronger in our faith in Christ, so that we will no longer fear what people may think of us (Ps 56:3,4; 118:6-8; Prov 29:25). The day is coming when many will be led astray, even those who at one time professed faith in Christ (1Tim 4:1). It is important that we not be influenced by them and also led astray.

As believers we are supposed to be different from those in the world. We are to be a positive influence for righteousness in the world around us. This is the meaning of being “light” and “salt” (Matt 5:13-16). “Light” presses back darkness; “salt” is a preserving influence against decay.

We are called to be a walking, living witness and testimony of the transforming power of God to change a human life. One of the most powerful ways this is accomplished, and what sets Christians apart, is our unconditional love for

others that comes through us from God. We are also to be a holy people (1Pet 1:13-19), those set apart to serve the living God (1Pet 2:9-12).

We recognize that there are evil people in the world, people who are influenced by demonic powers and principalities. But we must also recognize that most people are just “lost sheep”, scattered and hopeless without Christ the Shepherd. They are deceived and blind. Their worldview does not embrace the truths presented in the Word of God.

## OUR INFLUENCE ON OTHERS

The challenge for the believer is to be **in** the world – living as a witness for Christ and reaching to and loving the lost – and yet not be negatively influenced by the world’s philosophies and practices (Jas 1:27).

One mistaken approach among some Christians is to only associate with other Christians. While this may seem like a good practice, it is contrary to God’s plan of salvation for all of mankind. If all Christians withdrew from the world, how would the lost ever find Christ through our acts of love (Jas 2:14-16) or ever hear of the power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16; 10:14,15).

It is clear from the Great Commission that we are to GO, and make disciples for Christ. This is not the responsibility of pastors and leaders only, but of every believer in the Body of Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-49; Acts 1:6-8).

## THE INFLUENCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

The strategy of Satan in the world is very simple; it is to create experiences in life that would try to **separate us from the love** of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

But the Scriptures are given to us to help us know how to respond wisely and correctly in challenging circumstances. In particular, we have the Old Testament books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs and parts of Job. They are called the books of wisdom. They describe in very practical terms how to approach the circumstances of life. You can learn how to deal with all kinds of practical situations, including:

1. How to deal with a wide variety of people, from the noble and wise to the lazy and foolish.
2. How to deal with great health and strength, as well as weakness and sickness.
3. How to deal with wealth, as well as poverty and everything in between.

As Christians, we are called to be **more** than conquerors. We are to be fully **persuaded**, totally convinced through the Word of God and by faith, that no circumstance, absolutely **nothing can – or ever should – separate us from God’s love!** Romans 8:37-39 states it clearly: *“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

From the moment we are born, we are exposed to all kinds of experiences. We need to grow in discernment and realize what is of God and what is not.

When you are having a particularly challenging experience, that is the time to release your faith, put your trust in God and, having done all you can – stand! (Eph 6:13).

*“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”* (Heb 11:6).

## **THE INFLUENCE OF FALSE DOCTRINES ON WORLDVIEW**

When error in our personal understanding of God creeps into our life, it will lead to frustration, disappointment and failure to fulfill our full potential in Jesus Christ.

But when error creeps into the Church, the effect is widespread and far more catastrophic. It can continue for generations.

Pastors and leaders are given a sacred trust from God to study and know the truth, and to teach people that truth. How else will the Church be kept from error? God will hold pastors and leaders responsible for what they teach, what

they preach and how they live as an example to others (Jer 23:1,2; Ezek 34:1-10; 2Pet 2:1-22; 1John 2:18,19; 4:4-6).

Throughout the ages, many cults have been founded upon personal experience and not the doctrines (truths or teachings) of the Bible. For example, the Bible refers to the doctrines of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6,15), the doctrine of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Rev 2:14) and the doctrine of Jezebel (Rev 2:20). While not much is written in the Bible about these doctrines, it is obvious from the context that many were led astray by these false doctrines.

What we do know about false doctrines in general is that they are:

1. Contrary to the truth and doctrines of the Bible (Isa 8:20).
2. Usually based upon a person's experiences, dreams or interpretations (Jer 23:25-27).
3. Appealing and attractive to the human understanding (2Tim 4:3,4).
4. Developed by human understanding and not by the revelation of God (2Tim 3:7).

God may use dreams or visions to communicate with us on occasion (Matt 2:13,19; Acts 2:17,18). But if those dreams, visions or other experiences are contrary to the Word of God, we must choose to be faithful to the Bible. Being faithful to the Bible means to agree with what the Bible says, and to make life decisions and choices based upon what the Bible teaches.

Remember, the devil is able to disguise himself as an *"angel of light"* (2Cor 11:14) and many have gone to their own destruction by following that which appealed to their minds or their flesh. *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it"* (Matt 7:13).

## **THE SUPREMACY OF SCRIPTURE**

As sincere followers of Christ, what can we do to keep from being led astray by our natural worldview? God has given to us all that we need to live godly lives in Christ Jesus (2Pet 1:3,4). He has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us, to guide and transform us (John 14:16,17).

God has also given us His Holy Word, the Bible, so that we might be rightly instructed: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (2Tim 3:16). Let us look more closely at this enlightening Bible verse.

***“Is profitable for doctrine...”***

*“Profitable for doctrine”* means that **the Scriptures are essential** to knowing, living and teaching the will of God. They reveal to us Who God is. They also reveal the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ as mankind’s only Savior and Lord. The doctrines of Scripture must be our foundation for living and ministry!

The truths of the Bible **must replace** any ethics, cultural values or practices for living that contradict a biblical worldview. Those false “truths” that we have gained through our life’s experiences must be rejected, and replaced by the truth of the Bible.

## **PASTOR TO PASTOR:**

As pastors and leaders, we are called to understand and then to teach the **precepts** from the Bible. A *precept* is “a rule or principle prescribing a particular course of action or conduct”.

For example, Jesus gives us two precepts in Matthew 22:37-40: *“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’”*

In this verse, the first precept is to love God with everything that is in you; the second precept is to love our neighbor.

From precepts we then develop **concepts**. A concept is a general idea derived or inferred from the precepts of the Bible. The concept of Matthew 22:37-40 would be to love God with every thought, word and action, and to love all others whom God created with His unconditional love.

The Bible reveals to us all that we need to know for life and godliness. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, has the task of **illuminating** the Word of God to us (John 14:26). *Illumination* is to take that which is hidden and make it

known. *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven’”* (Matt 16:17). When one receives this illumination, it is sometimes referred to as personal revelation (Eph 1:17).

Illumination will always agree with the whole of the Bible. There is no *new* revelation from God (or any other source) other than what is already in the Word of God.

So, pastors, as you prepare your teachings, remember that from the Word of God come precepts, concepts and illumination.

### ***“For reproof...”***

The Scriptures are also given to convince or bring conviction to man of the truth of God’s love, forgiveness and acceptance; and to confound those who would deny the truth of the Gospel message.

We are not to rely solely on arguments or intellectual debates to communicate the truth of God’s Word (2Cor 10:5, 1Tim 6:4). The Word of God is living and powerful (Heb 4:12), and on its own can change even the human heart.

We can trust the power of the Word of God! We are to speak with confidence that which we have studied and know: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear”* (1Pet 3:15). The apostle Paul acknowledged the power of the Holy Spirit to also confirm the truth of the Gospel and of God’s Word: *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”* (1Cor 2:1-5).

### ***“For correction...”***

The Scriptures are to be our guide for restoring things to their proper use and place; for correcting false ideas and mistaken views: *“For God is not the*

*author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1Cor 14:33).*

The Bible is our final authority for what is right and true. If those you lead want to know what is right to do, take them to the Word of God for counsel and wisdom. Any other book, teaching, prophetic word or ministry gift must fully agree with the whole of the Bible before we should receive it.

Any teaching or prophecy that disagrees with what God has already revealed in His Word should *immediately* be rejected. There are false prophets, false religions, doctrines of demons – all are active in the world today (Matt 7:15-20; 24:4-12; 1Tim 4:1,2; 2Tim 4:3,4). We have the Word of God to show us what is true. We must use it to instruct, lead and protect the people of God that we are to shepherd.

As leaders, any correction that we bring to others should always be done with an attitude of humility and a spirit of gentleness (Gal 6:1; Eph 4:2,3).

***“For instruction in righteousness...”***

Because God is Holy, we are called to be holy in order to have fellowship with Him. This means that we must be made aware of what is right and just in God’s eyes, and live by those standards alone.

The Bible clearly tells us what to embrace and what to shun: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Mic 6:8; see also Galatians 5:19-23)

## DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

We now have a better understanding of what people believe and why people believe what they do. This highlights the importance of teaching, preaching and showing by living example the truths as found in the Bible.

## EVERYONE HAS AN OPINION

Many people have opinions based on nothing more than feelings or the traditions and wisdom of worldly people. This is often a result of pressures from peer groups, society, family and even the media. As a practical example, take a few minutes to think about what **you** really believe about the morality of some critical issues of our day, such as:

1. The death penalty for crimes
2. Abortion
3. Homosexuality
4. Pornography
5. Political parties
6. The Role of Government
7. Truth
8. Relativism
9. Sin
10. God
11. Church

We all have opinions and perspectives, even strong feelings, about these issues. The real question is: Do our opinions or feelings agree with what is in the Bible? You can also ask: What would Jesus' perspective be on matters of morality or truth? Let's look at just some of what He taught:

- *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill”* (Matt 5:17).
- *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”* (Matt 7:21).
- *“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner’”* (John 5:19).

The question is not, “Do we have a worldview?”, because we **all** have a worldview. The question is, “What is the basis of our worldview?” How did we form our opinions and why? Are our opinions based on casual acceptance, carefully considered thought, or a foundation of core beliefs?

# FOUNDATION OF CORE BELIEFS

A biblical worldview is one which is based upon the rules of action or conduct given to us in Scripture. These rules were given by God, the One who created mankind, and Who knows what is best for us. As pastors and leaders, we should be boldly proclaiming this biblical worldview.

A biblical worldview is formed upon a solid foundation of core beliefs. For a Christian, these core beliefs consist primarily of the Ten Commandments and the **precepts** of the Bible. Precepts are commands or principles intended as a general rule of action or conduct.

Of the many biblical doctrines and precepts we could study, let us briefly look at **ten essential precepts or doctrines** that should be at the core of a biblical worldview:

1. **The Bible**, including both Old Testament and New Testament, is without error as originally given (2 Pet 1:20,21).
  - The Bible was verbally inspired (“*breathed out*”) by God and is a complete revelation of His character and will for the salvation of men (2Tim 3:16,17).
  - The Scriptures constitute the divine and only rule of Christian faith and practice (2Tim 3:17).
2. **There is one God** who is infinitely perfect (Matt 5:48).
  - God exists in three Persons: Father (Phil 2:11), Son (John 10:30) and Holy Spirit (2Cor 3:17). Each is fully God, yet these three Persons are one (Deut 6:4).
3. **Jesus Christ** is the image (exact representation or revelation) of the invisible God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), which is to say that He is also God (John 10:30).
  - He took upon Himself a human nature (Phil 2:5-8; Heb 2:9).
  - He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matt 1:20-23; Luke 1:34).
  - He suffered and died upon the cross (John 19:30) as a substitute, a sacrifice for the sin of the world (Heb 9:26).
  - He physically rose from the dead (Luke 24:1-7) and ascended into heaven (Acts 2:32,33) where He is now interceding for us as our High Priest (Heb 7:25).
  - He will come again, personally and visibly (Luke 21:27; Col 3:4) to judge the living and the dead (2Tim 4:1).

4. **The Holy Spirit** is a divine Person, God (2Cor 3:17, 18).
  - The Holy Spirit is sent to indwell (John 14:17), guide (John 16:13), teach (John 14:26), empower (Gal 5:16,17), and transform (Gal 5:22-25) every believer in Jesus Christ.
  - The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8-10).
5. **Man** was created by God in His image and likeness (Gen 1:27).
  - Man chose rebellion against God's righteous commands, thus falling into a state of sin (Rom 5:12). This is true of all men (Rom 3:23), and unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).
  - Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone (Rom 3:24; Eph 2:8,9).
  - The punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous are everlasting (2Thess 1:9; 1Tim 1:16).
  - The righteous will know and experience their reward; the wicked will know and experience their eternal punishment (Matt 25:31-46; 2Pet 2:9).
6. **Salvation** has been provided through Jesus Christ alone for all people (John 3:15-17).
  - Only those who repent and believe in Him are born again (John 3:3; Acts 2:38) of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5); there is no other way of salvation than through faith in Christ; there are not many ways to God (John 14:6).
  - Those who are born again receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16) and become the children of God (Rom 8:16).
7. **Sanctification**, holiness and the overcoming life are God's design and command for the Church, which is the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27; 1Pet 1:13-16).
  - Sanctification includes: 1) a consecration or setting apart of every believer's life for holy use; and 2) a progressive cleansing from all moral defilement throughout one's lifetime (2Cor 3:18; 2Tim 2:19-21; 1John 3:2,3).
  - In the area of sanctification, sexual purity is necessary for all of God's children and requires abstinence from adultery, fornication, incest, homosexuality or other sexual relationships or practices forbidden by Scripture (1Cor 6:18; 1Thess 4:1-8; Heb 13:4; Lev 18:1-30); marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime, and is a sacred institution established by God (Matt 19:4-6).

8. **Being filled with or led by the Holy Spirit** is the will of God for each believer (Luke 11:13; 1Cor 2:12; Eph 5:18)
  - It is evidenced by ongoing sanctification (2Thess 2:13), being separated from sin and the world (Rom 8:12-14) and being fully dedicated to the will of God (Phil 2:13).
  - It leads to receiving power for holy living and effective service working through love (Gal 5:6).
9. **The Church** consists of two manifestations:
  - **The Global Church**, which consists of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-41,47), are redeemed through His blood (Heb 9:14) and are born again of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church (Col 1:18), which has been commissioned by Him to go into all the world as a witness, preaching the Gospel to all nations (Matt 28:19).
  - **The Local Church**, which is the body of believers in Christ in a local assembly who are joined together for the worship of God (John 4:23), edification through the Word of God (2Tim 3:14-15), prayer (Isa 56:7), fellowship (Acts 2:42), the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 2:47), and the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:7-20). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested within the assembly for the edification of the saints for the work of the ministry (1Cor 12:4-12).
10. **The Resurrection** shall be a bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust: for the just, a resurrection unto life; for the unjust, a resurrection unto judgment (John 5:28,29; 1Cor 15:50-58).

These ten basic doctrines from Scripture provide a solid basis for developing a biblical worldview. But having a biblical worldview goes beyond just having right beliefs or correct understanding. We must be in "agreement with God" from the deepest part of our being, exhibiting full cooperation with His Spirit and a desire to obey God and do His will.

## **AGREEMENT**

The Bible teaches that our walk with God requires agreement with Him. "*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*" (Amos 3:3).

Agreement with God means more than just an intellectual or mental assent, for even the demons believe in God and tremble (Jas 2:19). God is looking for our intellectual agreement with Him that is then confirmed through our actions of obedience! This is true of all believers, but especially true of pastors and leaders – because we are responsible for what we teach in words *and* through the example of our lives.

*Agreement* means to “come into harmony regarding a matter of opinion, sharing the same perspective.” God has made His ways known through the Bible. It is our responsibility to enter into agreement with His Word. Agreeing with God’s view of the world is more than acknowledging that He is right.

Agreement means that we have replaced our view with His view, and we then live our lives according to His ways.

We can agree with a biblical worldview and the core beliefs founded upon Scripture, yet still be very **inconsistent** in how we apply what we know in our own lives. In other words, we can say that we believe one thing and yet do another. That should never be.

As pastors and leaders, it is imperative that we do our utmost every day to live out what we are teaching to others from the Bible (Rom 2:21-24).

## PASTOR TO PASTOR

Pastor, as a minister of the Gospel, are you preaching, teaching, counseling and modeling a biblical worldview? Sadly, many today are presenting as truth their personal opinions, secular humanism and other forms of the “traditions of men”. They are preaching ideas that appeal to human flesh, but that work against raising up submitted, obedient and humble disciples of Jesus (1Tim 4:1,2; 2Tim 4:3,4).

Remember that the apostle Paul cautions the Church against ministers who have a non-biblical worldview: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ”* (Col 2:8). It takes faith and courage to go against the flow of popular opinion and be a man or woman of conviction who preaches the truth. As ministers and as individuals, if we do not stand for a biblical worldview, we will be led astray by the latest popular trend, theory or deception (Eph 4:14).

Today's culture puts pressure on us to be "tolerant". This tolerance often expresses itself as "all things are permitted" or "even if it's wrong, I won't judge someone else for doing it."

**But compromise is always wrong when it means sacrificing biblical principles.** We can be tolerant of people when they stumble; but we should never be tolerant of any attitude or behavior that does not conform to *the* Truth, the Word of God.

We must never compromise or dilute the truth of God's Word to make it more acceptable. The Bible and its standards will be an offense to some (Rom 9:32; 1Pet 2:4-8), but the truth can save them from destruction.

## THE TRANSFORMING IMPACT OF A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

At this point we have gained a better understanding of our heavenly citizenship, while also learning:

1. What a worldview is;
2. How a worldview is formed;
3. The importance of being aware of our own worldview; and
4. The need to develop a biblical worldview.

As pastors and leaders, it will be of great benefit to learn how to effectively teach, preach, and impart a biblical worldview. An essential element of this is creating an environment where the Holy Spirit is welcomed to do the work of **renewal** and **transformation** in individual lives.

## A RENEWED MIND- CHANGING OUR WORLDVIEW

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rom 12:2).

## SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is essential for the ongoing growth of every believer. As we have learned, sanctification is both a consecration of our life to God and a progressive cleansing from moral defilement.

But there is more to sanctification than developing good moral character. True sanctification is a process that incorporates the liberating truth of God's Word, our faith to receive it, and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in the life of a believer.

Before receiving Christ, much of what we were and did was the result of being conformed to the world's standards (we have already studied the many ways a carnal worldview is formed).

But after salvation, and through the ongoing work of sanctification, our worldview can be changed. As our worldview becomes more biblically based, we can more readily believe and obey the entire Word of God and better cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us study this important aspect of the Christian life in a bit more detail.

## **LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION**

Each person is made up of three parts: body, soul and spirit (1Thess 5:23.)

The "body" is our physical body. Our body uses the five senses – hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching – to communicate with the physical world we live in.

The "soul" is the place of our emotions (feelings), our will (the ability to choose) and our mind (intellect). Our personality comes from our soul. The soul is sometimes referred to as "the heart of man". The soul provides another level of communication with the people and environment around us.

## **THE SPIRIT OF MAN**

Though people can relate to one another at a physical level and through their soul, we are limited in our physical and intellectual ability to fully comprehend the things of God: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love*

*Him*" (1Cor 2:9; see also Isa 55:8,9; Rom 11:33-36). Neither our body ("eye/ear") nor our soul ("heart") can fully understand God and His ways.

But God has also created each person with a spirit. The spirit of each person is dead in sin. But at salvation, the spirit is made alive by the Spirit of God (Rom 6:11,13; 1Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1,5; 1Pet 3:18).

Also at salvation, each person receives the Holy Spirit within (John 3:5-8; Acts 2:38,39). The Holy Spirit helps us to see, hear and comprehend the spiritual things that have been given to us by God. *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God"* (1Cor 2:12).

Communication with God goes beyond the limits of human intellect or man's wisdom. It is His Spirit teaching our spirit: *"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual"* (1Cor 2:13). As Christians, we have also been given the *"mind of Christ"* (1Cor 2:16) to assist us in understanding God.

Hallelujah! God has given us **everything we need** to know God, to commune with Him daily, and to live a godly and overcoming Christian life (2Pet 1:3). But oftentimes we need to learn how to receive and use what God has given to us.

God has said that those who walk by the Spirit are sons of God (Rom 8:12-17). As His sons, He has made it possible for us to communicate with God our Father. But as with any gift from God, we often must learn how to use what He has given us.

Jesus states, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27). Most of us learned at a young age how to communicate physically and intellectually. But learning to communicate with God at a spiritual dimension can take time. Any hindrances to communion with God must be dealt with in our lives, and we must also grow in spiritual sensitivity.

## **THE NATURAL MAN**

The Bible reveals that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). As a “fallen” humanity, all are blind to the spiritual truths of God.

The individual who rejects the gift of God in Christ and is not born again is referred to as a “natural man”: *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1Cor 2:14).

The natural man can understand only with his mind (soul). Therefore, he cannot receive or know the spiritual things of God.

## THE SPIRITUAL MAN

However, when we are born again, the ability to understand the spiritual things of God is opened to us. The capacity to develop a biblical worldview is made possible because of the Holy Spirit’s work within us (1Cor 6:19). His work in reshaping our worldview is an essential part of our minds being **renewed** (Rom 12:2).

In order for our minds to be renewed, we must examine what we believe. We need to compare what we have learned from the world with what is taught by God. Our minds need to be renewed (changed) in those areas where an ungodly worldview has taken hold: *“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph 4:20-24).

When we are born again, our spirit is made alive and enabled to communicate with God. This communication is a two-way dialogue, in that we speak and He hears (Ps 4:3; 1John 5:14). Equally important is that when God speaks to us, we will have the ability to hear Him (1Cor 2:11-13; refs). Jesus said that we will be able to hear Him, and thus follow Him (John 10:27).

## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK

The Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, is our Helper and lives within every believer. The Holy Spirit illuminates (brings understanding of) the truths of God's Word and reveals to us the need to make corrections in our lives.

These corrections are part of the process of renewing our minds. A renewed mind does not simply have greater intellectual ability, but an ability to recognize and know the truth of God's Word.

This process of renewal results in our transformation: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord"* (2Cor 3:17,18).

When our minds are renewed, it affects our attitude and behavior, as we take off the "old man" and put on the "new man". The result of this work of the Spirit will be fruit that can clearly be seen in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22,23).

When we live according to God's ways, we can experience a truly fulfilled and victorious Christian life. God can bless only what He approves.

## **TRANSFORMATION – A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW**

As our minds are renewed, we are changed or transformed. *Transformation* can be defined as "a marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better".

The Bible tells us that, in Christ, we are new creations. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2Cor 5:17).

The Holy Spirit lives in every believer to lead and guide them into truth. The Holy Spirit is sent to indwell (John 14:17), guide (John 16:13), teach (John 14:26) and empower (Gal 5:16,17) the believer.

The Holy Spirit helps believers to see the world as Jesus does. *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I*

said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-15; see also John 14:15-17, 25, 26; 15:26).

## THE CONFLICT WITHIN

What a great gift we have been given in the Person of the Holy Spirit! He is there to help us continually, and desires that we live an overcoming Christian life.

But the Holy Spirit will not do His work in us against our will. Each of us must continually choose either to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, or to rebel. We must choose either to be led by the Spirit of God, or to lean on our own understanding. We must either choose to obey the Word and be transformed, or to resist and stay as we are.

Sometimes this choice needs to be made many times in one day. The Holy Spirit is always present, always working within us to transform us more and more into the image of Jesus.

This process of transformation is not always easy. It can create a conflict or struggle within us. We want to do the Lord’s will; but our flesh also wants its own way. The apostle Paul put it this way: *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”* (Gal 5:17).

## SUBTITLE

The Bible reveals that the Spirit within us and our flesh (soul of man) are at war (Rom 7:23; 1Pet 2:11,12). Both the Spirit and our own soul want to influence our thoughts, actions and choices. God desires to lead us in His ways by His Spirit; the devil, the world and our own lusts want to draw us away from God.

*“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law”* (Gal 5:16-18).

In a “natural man” (one who is **not** born-again) the spirit is dead, separated from God. So there is no battle against the Spirit in them, because the Spirit does not indwell them. The body and the soul do whatever seems desirable to

do, as in the period of the Judges in Israel, when “...everyone *did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 21:25).

But when we are born again, the Holy Spirit begins to work to influence us toward righteousness. In our immaturity, our soul (and often our body) will resist the Spirit. Our old habits or desires want to pull us back into sin. It can therefore be difficult to be led by the Spirit. “*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ*” (1Cor 3:1).

This is one of the reasons it is so important that our minds be renewed by the Word of God. The more we know and understand God’s ways, the more we can recognize what is of Him and what is of our flesh. Each time we choose God’s ways over our fleshly desires, our spirit is strengthened! Slowly but surely, our spirit will desire agreement with the Holy Spirit more than with our own way. “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Rom 12:2).

The continuing renewal of the mind strengthens us to choose to obey the Word of God. A renewed mind is more easily convicted and led by the Holy Spirit. Our old habits will fall away and be replaced by new habits of holiness. “*But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind , and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph 4:20-24).

As the renewal process continues, our personal transformation becomes more obvious. “*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (Col 3:9,10). Eventually our mind and spirit come more into agreement, and our body (flesh) loses its influence.

This process of renewal and transformation is a process that begins at salvation, and is not completed until we have reached our eternal home (Rom 8:29,30; 1Cor 13:12; 2Cor 3:18).

## **PASTOR TO PASTOR**

I hope you can clearly see, pastor, the importance of knowing the Word of God and of teaching it consistently and completely to your church. Each of us has elements of our worldview that are likely not in line with the Bible. Every one of us needs our mind renewed and our life transformed! That happens in conjunction with the truth of the living Word of God and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me remind you that this work of renewal and transformation is a lifelong process. I was recently asked, “Why does transformation take so long, and why is it so difficult? Why doesn’t God just do the work in us right away?”

My answer was, “That is a question that only God can answer; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. But this I do know God wants us to obey Him as a free will expression of our love. Our choices are such an important ingredient in our relationship with God. While transformation may be a difficult journey, God has given us all of the tools, the authority and the power to succeed.”

## THE TOOLS OF RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION

God in His wisdom has provided everything that we need for *“life and godliness”* (2Pet 1:3). God has given us: His Son as the only way of salvation (John 3:16); His Holy Spirit to guide us (John 16:13); and His Word to instruct us in righteousness (Psalm 119:105).

For Christians, our desire should be a renewed mind that seeks to be led by the Spirit of God. As our minds are renewed, we will be transformed more into the image of Christ.

But what tools does God use in this transformation process? Let us look at some of those now.

### 1. **Bible Study for Information and Revelation**

The importance of the Word of God for personal transformation cannot be overestimated. The Bible is God’s complete revelation for mankind, and is **NOT** to be added to or taken away from (Rev 22:18,19).

We can read or study the Bible in two basic ways. The first is to gain **knowledge**. This can be referred to the **logos** Word or written Word. The word *logos* is Greek for “word”.

To gain knowledge is to learn facts and information found in the Bible, such as:

1. Divisions of the Bible (Old Testament and New Testament; prophetic books, historical books and poetic books)
2. The names of the books of the Bible
3. Dispensations or ages of the Bible
4. The Covenants of the Bible
5. Stories and parables of the Bible
6. Personalities and characters of the Bible
7. Chronology and history of the Bible

Learning the things listed above will help us to gain the proper perspective on, understanding of and reverence for the Bible. We will learn about the nature of God, His holiness and sovereignty. We will become familiar with His promises and provisions. At the same time, we will learn what God expects of us. We will learn that we are to be holy and set apart for His purposes.

When we study the Bible in this way, we are gaining knowledge from the “logos” Word (written) and laying a foundation for the next level, which is **understanding**.

## **SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING**

Understanding of the Word of God comes through illumination (revelation). There is another Greek word for “word” and that is **rhema**, or the spoken word. This refers to the spiritual nature of the Scriptures.

The Word of God is not just a collection of religious-sounding words. It is Spirit-breathed, living, powerful and spiritual. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb 4:12).

Because of the spiritual nature of the Bible, the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to “speak” to us – Spirit to spirit! As we are reading or studying the Bible, the Scriptures can suddenly come alive to our understanding. It is as if God by His Spirit is speaking directly to us through His Word about something specific that concerns us.

God speaking to us through the Scriptures should be common among born-again Christians, because they are spiritual and the Scriptures are spiritually inspired (2Tim 3:16). Theologians like to say that the Holy Spirit “illuminates” the Scriptures to give us understanding that is not simply intellectual, but spiritual. It becomes a personal, and often life-transforming, revelation of truth to us. A natural man (one not born again) is unable to receive this spiritual understanding (1Cor 2:13-15).

During these devotional times in the Word, the *rhema* Word becomes life-changing. There is no doubt that God has shown you something profound and personal just for you. You realize that God is revealing a life-impacting truth to you through the Scriptures.

Remember, you are not just to gain knowledge; you are also to get understanding (Prov 4:7). It is important to respond to the understanding you receive in an appropriate manner. This might mean you should repent, forgive someone, change a habit or behavior, freshly receive God’s love, or many other responses.

Decide that you want more than just **knowledge** (*logos*) from the Word of God. Sensitize your heart, and pray for and pursue revelation and **understanding** (*rhema*).

## 2. The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is an important transformational tool, especially when it is understood that prayer is a *dialogue* between you and God.

Often we are taught to pray as a means of making our petitions known to God. We ask, but then we fail to listen in return. We do not expect God to speak to us.

But prayer is not a one-way communication. ***Prayer is a dialogue*** between a believer and God. You speak and God listens; God speaks and you listen –

each taking turns to speak and listen. God often has something to say to us if we will listen expectantly in faith.

As we study the Scriptures, we should be praying for understanding and revelation. As we are reading, we should be asking God, “Lord, what does this mean?” Our attitude should be that of expecting the Holy Spirit to illuminate, reveal and make clear His truths.

Sometimes there are obstacles to our ability to hear God clearly. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the obstacles so that we may repent, overcome and move forward in our relationship with Him.

### 3. The Importance of True Worship

The word *worship* is defined as “adoration and devotion to God”. Worship is central to fulfilling God’s call upon our lives and to representing accurate theology. But most importantly, worship is something that God desires from each one of us.

In its primary meaning, “worship” is not about an outward form, but is “spiritual worship”. Jesus, while speaking to the woman at the well, says, “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him*” (John 4:23). While God’s definition of worship has never changed, many today have focused on other meanings of worship. For example:

1. A style of music, such as “worship music”; or,
2. The activity of going to church (“I attended a worship service on Sunday”).

Both of these concepts of worship are valid. However, if they become our *primary* definition of worship, we run the risk of replacing the primary meaning of worship with a secondary one. It becomes easier to occasionally enjoy good worship music than to lead a daily lifestyle devoted to God.

Worship is not a *part* of the Christian life; it *is* the Christian life! “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [or worship]*” (Rom 12:1).

True, heartfelt worship is essential to victorious Christianity. We need the “Spirit to spirit” communion with God that can happen only as we bow before

Him and adore Him. Our outward worship must come as a direct result of what is inside – a heart fully submitted to God as Lord and King. Otherwise, our worship will be just a form without power, *“having a form of godliness but denying its power”* (2Tim 3:5).

How do we discern the difference between the outward form and the inner heart of worship? What is the measure of “true” worship?

Spiritual worship is more than a once-a-week offering in church. Spiritual worship should reveal our daily submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives, and our desire to be obedient to Him. The true measure of spiritual worship is found in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

**The most important fruit of ministry is transformed lives.** As pastors and leaders, we need to provide a regular environment where people can meet with God in worship. There must be time given to express praise and honor to God, and then to wait upon Him to work in the lives of people. True spiritual worship is complete submission to Christ’s Lordship and openness to His presence at work in our daily life.

#### 4. The Importance of a Commitment to a Church

*“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Heb 10:24,25).

The local church is not a building; the church is an assembly of believers united under One Head, Jesus Christ (1Cor 12; Eph 1:22-23).

When leading (or attending) a church, there are three essential things that should be present:

##### a. The church must be Bible-based.

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet 1:20,21).

There are several ways to discern a Bible-based church. The teachings will all come from text and verses from the Bible. The congregation will be carrying and using their Bibles. The pastor and leadership will be faithful students of the Word of God, living their lives in accordance with the Bible.

There are no books or any other form of media that can substitute for, add to or subtract from God's Word. The foundation for all teaching in a spiritually healthy church will be the Word of God.

#### **b. The church must be doctrinally sound.**

*“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2Tim 4:3,4).*

Any doctrine that is taught or modeled must have its foundation in the Word of God. A church should have a “Statement of Faith” that lists the doctrines they believe in, supported by biblical references.

#### **c. The church must recognize the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.**

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1Cor 6:19).*

Beware of any attempt to add to the finished work of grace by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. The easiest sign to alert you to this deception is too much concern with the trappings of the law – an over-emphasis on rules and regulations of behavior, dress and speech, rather than on inward, spiritual transformation.

This emphasis on outward form is known as “legalism”. It is a vain, outward attempt to substitute for the genuine, inward transforming work of the Holy Spirit: *“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3).*

God is not looking for conformity, which is only outward change. God instead desires genuine **transformation**, which is change from the inside (the heart). This inward change will, however, often result in changes of behavior and even in the outward appearance (Col 2).

We can be confident that the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with His tools of renewal and transformation – the Bible, prayer, worship and church – is able to accomplish a powerful transforming work in anyone who will submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He will never give up on us, if we will not give up on Him: *“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day”* (2Tim 1:12).

## SOME ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES

As we develop a biblical/Christian worldview, and lead others to do the same, there are certain principles to keep in mind.

### 1. **Working *with* or working *for* God!**

It is important to encourage others in their understanding and faith to believe. We are to help them place their trust in God and His Word. This cannot be accomplished by creating a religious system of rules and regulations for them to follow. Instead, our primary goal as pastors and leaders is to help others enter into a genuine **relationship** with Jesus Christ. Of course, we must have that relationship with Christ as well!

A relationship implies working together **with** God. He desires to work in us, His sons and daughters. We cooperate with this process by yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives, as well as in the church. In this sense, we are partnering with God (John 15:15).

In contrast, the idea of working **for** God implies the employer/employee relationship, or a master/servant relationship. As believers, we are sons and daughters of the King – His friends and not servants (John 15:9-17). We gladly serve Him, but out of love and relationship. Our citizenship is from Heaven and we are ambassadors for our King!

### 2. **As a man thinks...**

It is not what you say, but what you really **believe** that determines who you are: *“For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he”* (Prov 23:7).

Many of the tests in life that God allows us to experience have one primary purpose: To confirm or deny that what we **say** we believe is in fact what we **do** believe (John 6:6, Deut 8:2).

Our actions speak louder than words. God is not looking for men and women who simply know the truth, but for those who will also **do** the truth. *“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall”* (Matt 7:26,27).

Our actions must be aligned with biblical principles. It has been said that as a man thinks, he will develop an action; as a man acts, he will develop a habit; as a man develops that habit, he will develop character; as a man develops character, he will develop a destiny. Our ultimate destiny is to be *“conformed to the image of [Christ]”* (Rom 8:29).

### 3. **“Amen”, or Agreeing with God**

It is important to examine what we believe, and then discern what does or does not align with the Word of God. God’s Word, the Bible, is the foundation upon which we build our core beliefs. That which God accepts, we must accept. That which God rejects, we must reject. We must agree (or “amen”) with Him (Amos 3:3).

There will be times when our personal experience or secular training will conflict with our understanding of what the Bible requires of us. It is during these times that our faith is tested.

Let us then take the attitude of the apostle Paul: *“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day”*(2Tim 1:12).

### 4. **Ambassadors for Christ**

One of the primary responsibilities here on earth for every believer is to live as an ambassador for Christ. We have been given the authority to represent Jesus Christ our King to others (2Cor 5:20). This is why our personal transformation is so important! How can we represent Christ adequately if our lives or beliefs are not aligned with His?

We are to be ambassadors at all times – not just during times of ministry, but at home, in the workplace, in school or wherever else we might be. As we become more like Him, and are sensitive to be led by His Spirit, we will represent Him far more accurately to the world around us.

## 5. Seekers of Truth

*“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”* (John 17:17, Ps 119:160). We need to become seekers of truth as it is defined by the Bible.

The truth will set you free; a lie will put you in bondage! *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32).

A partial truth is still a lie. Something is either true, or it is not. Satan understands this, and often attempts to distort or twist the truth in order to tempt or deceive us. All that we believe and practice must align completely with the Bible!

## 6. Our Citizenship

Remember that as believers in Jesus Christ, our citizenship is in Heaven (Phil 3:20). Our worldview should be from a heavenly perspective. This means that the culture we live in or the traditions that we have are secondary to the fact that our home and our nationality is now from Heaven.

We are not Mexican, Indian, African, American, European or any other nationality, but we are first Christians! Our national patriotism, beliefs and traditions are secondary to our identity as Christians.

## PASTOR TO PASTOR

I was once teaching a class on the topic of “Integrity” with a group of pastors. At the end, I mentioned that stealing is always wrong, regardless of the size or worth of what it is that’s being stolen. One pastor commented, “It is the **custom in this country** that when someone leaves something, like a wristwatch, and walks away from it, that it now becomes available for anyone to pick it up. Whoever picks it up can keep it, even if they know who left it behind.” I shocked them when I replied, “This is no longer your country, and the customs of this country do not apply to you! Your citizenship is now in Heaven, and the laws of Heaven are what we live by as Christians. God says, ‘You shall not steal.’ That is now your custom!” The pastors immediately

understood the truth of the Word when they examined their custom against the standards of the Word of God.

## 7. Separating Culture from Doctrine

As we study the Bible, we must be careful to discern what is cultural (local) and what is doctrinal (universal). For example, in the New Testament there are four Gospels, each written to different audiences (local). But each Gospel contained only one (universal) message. That message was written, however, so that the audience receiving it could understand it:

- The Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew to appeal to other Jews.
- The Gospel of Mark was written by a Jew who was appealing to Gentiles.
- The Gospel of Luke was written by a Gentile to other Gentiles.
- The Gospel of John was written to both Jews and Gentiles.

Furthermore,

- The book of Romans was written to appeal to the Roman way of thinking.
  - The book of Hebrews was written to appeal to the Hebrew traditions and mind.

In each case, care was taken to communicate in a manner that the people of those cultures and traditions (worldview) could understand. But never was the message of the Gospel changed or compromised to make it more acceptable to the culture.

## PASTOR TO PASTOR

As pastors and leaders, we must be very careful to not fall into the trap of syncretism. Syncretism is blending or compromising the truth with other beliefs in order to make it more acceptable (or less offensive) to others. We must never change or compromise the Word of God in order to make it fit into an existing culture or practice.

For example:

- To say that Jesus is only a prophet, or just one of many gods because the culture believes in many gods, would be a serious compromise of doctrine

and therefore heresy. It would lead to bondage and confusion. There is One God, One Savior, and that truth must be declared.

- To say that women must cover their heads in church (see 1 Corinthians 11:1-16) reflects a cultural practice, simply an expression of a local tradition of honoring God. It is not a doctrine.

## 8. Do Not Be Ignorant

Paul the apostle opens Chapter 12 of his letter to the Corinthian church with a loving rebuke regarding not being ignorant of spiritual gifts (1Cor 12:1). This principle of “do not be ignorant” applies to many areas of our worldview. To be ignorant simply means to not know or not be aware of some fact or truth.

For example, there is an area where the common cultural practice is for husbands to beat their wives. At a recent conference, a minister taught from Ephesians 5 about the importance of loving your wife as Christ loves His Bride, the Church. The conviction of the Holy Spirit came upon the pastors, and they began to cry out in repentance. They had been raised in their culture to beat their wives, and were only doing what they saw their fathers and grandfathers do. They didn't realize this practice was unbiblical, harmful to their spouses and displeased the Lord.

These pastors had their worldview change in an instant. They had a personal revelation of the truth of the Bible. The Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit set them free from cultural bondage into scriptural freedom in love. Hallelujah!

## ARE YOU A CHICKEN OR AN EAGLE?

There was once a farmer who raised chickens. One day, as he was walking through the fields, he found a large egg. Wondering what kind of animal had produced it, he took it home to see if one of his chickens would sit on it and hatch it. A particular hen accepted the egg, even though the egg was larger than her others.

In the process of time, the hen's eggs began to hatch. Out of each egg stumbled a little yellow chick. The strange new egg was the last to hatch, and out popped a large chick with big feet and a muddy gray color. As the other chickens observed this new addition, they all thought, “That is the ugliest looking chicken!”

Life was difficult for the young bird. Though he tried very hard to fit in, he was awkward and very un-chicken like. He had difficulty walking like the other chickens, and pecking at food was a challenge with his large crooked beak. It was not long before the other chickens began to avoid him because he seemed so odd. He felt isolated and rejected.

One day, while looking up at the sun, the young bird noticed two beautiful, majestic birds soaring high in the sky. They seemed to be circling over him, making sounds unlike any he had heard the chickens make. Their cry was strangely attractive, almost as if it were an invitation, "Come and fly with us." The birds flew overhead for several days and then disappeared.

From that time on, the young bird could only think about flying, soaring with those majestic birds. But he knew chickens could not fly. Chickens are earthly, not heavenly!

Then one day, when no one was looking, this bird stretched out his wings and flapped them. Amazingly, he rose off the ground, gracefully and powerfully. But he was too afraid to actually fly away. "What would the other chickens say?"

So, he would secretly dream about flying, wanting to be like those birds he saw soaring in the sky instead of being an earthbound chicken.

As the days went by, those majestic birds returned. They again began to circle overhead. They were so high in the air, and yet he could hear them calling, "Come fly with us." Something strange began to happen to the young bird. He suddenly threw his shoulders back, stretched out his wings, and with a strength and power he didn't know he had, he began to fly!

Spiraling ever upward, with his eyes focused on the sun, he was soon soaring with those two strange birds. As he approached, he was startled to realize that he looked just like them. They were beautiful, powerful and majestic. Suddenly the revelation came to him, "I am not a chicken... I am an eagle!" Joy flooded his soul as he felt like he was where he belonged. For the first time in his life, he felt true love and acceptance.

One of the mature eagles said, "We were wondering why it took you so long to join us."

The young eagle responded, "I didn't know I was an eagle. Because I was born among chickens, and lived among chickens, I thought I was a chicken."

The older eagle replied, "You acted like a chicken because you thought like a chicken; but, now that you know the truth, the truth has set you free... to be an eagle. This is what you were born to do. Your home is not in the chicken coop, but here with us in the heavens. Come let us soar..." *"But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"* (Isa 40:31).

Christians are called to be eagles, not chickens! Though we may be in the world, we are not of the world. Our citizenship is in heaven. The transforming power of the Bible and the work and leading of the Holy Spirit are sufficient to overcome the negative impact and influence that the world has had upon our worldview.

It is truly an exciting adventure to begin to see ourselves, our families, our churches and our ministries as God see them. This is what a biblical worldview provides: to recognize that our citizenship is in Heaven; to see the world we live in from a more heavenly perspective; and to find our place in God's Kingdom work as we are being transformed into Christ's image more and more by His Spirit!

My prayer for you is that *"the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"* (Eph 1:18). Amen!