

Colossians 1:15-23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

As we go through the Story of Everything, if it really is “everything”, then how are we in the story? The bible is about God. But it is written to us and from time to time we want to take a Sunday to look at how we can faithfully see ourselves in God’s story, and help answer some big questions. And today we want to tackle the biggest questions of life.

Slides:

The great philosopher Snoopy.

An inquisitive boy says to mom, “I understand *how* I was born; I want to know *why*.”

The Meaning of Life ... or cheese.

We answer these questions with something called a “worldview”.

What is a Worldview?

A worldview is a how we try to make sense of the world, and our lives in it. A great framework Ravi Zacharias used frequently is:

Origin (Where did I come from?)

Meaning (Why am I here?)

Morality (How do I live?)

Destiny (Where am I going?)

All the big questions of life funnel through one of these categories.

Three (Very) General Categories of Wordviews:

1) God doesn’t exist, only the universe exists (Atheism)

2) Only God exists. The universe doesn't exist (Eastern Religions, New Age Movement)

3) God and the universe exist (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

-Important note: this doesn't imply all these religions answer life's questions the same way – they clearly don't.

(1) Origin:

Where did I come from?

Atheistic worldview: Materialism – we are products of time, matter, and chance.

Christian perspective:

From the text: God is creator.

Colossians 1:16,17

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him”

Gen 1:1; 26,27

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

Does it matter? Yes! It forms the fundamental assumptions related to what does it mean to be human?

Consequences of the Christian worldview:

Basis for understanding humanity:

1. Foundation for Human Value
2. Foundation for Human Dignity
3. Foundation for Human Ethics

Every human being can root their identity and worth in the fact that God has made them in his image. In fact, this is the only place that you can do so logically.

GK Chesterton:

“All men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the King.”

Materialist viewpoint:

Richard Dawkins:

“We animals exist for our preservation and are nothing more than our genes, we are throwaway survival machines.”

A materialist approach presents profound problems when trying to establish human dignity.

UN Declaration of Human Rights (can find all 30 Articles on UN.org):

Preamble:

“Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,”

Article 1.

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

On what basis are we presuming human dignity, given there is no mention of God?

How do we avoid being arbitrary? Why differentiate between human life and the rest of life on earth? The Christian has no trouble doing this. All humans are made in the image of God. Lets say you do distinguish between animals and humans; you are now stuck with a bigger problem, which atheist Sam Harris admits in his book “The End of Faith”.

“The problem is that whatever attributes we use to differentiate between humans and animals; intelligence, language use, moral sentiments and so on, will equally differentiate between human beings themselves.” The problem isn’t in the aspiration. I have no problem with the intentions behind the UN statement, I just know they cant get to where they want to go without God.

This becomes very problematic when working through ethical issues. The fundamental beliefs of our society are not aligned with our ethical aspirations (ie equality).

CS Lewis (The Weight of Glory):

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization – these are mortal, and their life is ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.”

Ideas always have consequences and the ideas we have regarding where we come from influence every aspect of our lives, which leads us to ...

(2) Meaning:

Mortimer Adler, Editor, Encyclopaedia Britannica

“More consequences for thought and action follow from the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other question.”

We come to meaning by way of identity and value.

From the text:

Col 1:16b “*all things were created **through** him and **for** him.*”

Essence precedes existence - (Christian Worldview)

Essence (who we are) precedes existence (what we are). This is the traditional biblical viewpoint. We have inherent identity and value because we are made in the image of God. When we deny God we must logically flip this around to:

Existence precedes essence - (Humanistic/Atheistic Worldview)

This is what the 20th century existentialist movement (see J.P. Sartre, A. Camus et al) boiled down to, but this is no mere esoteric philosophical babble – it is the logical conclusion of the humanistic project (by that I mean the project of man living outside of God). It is the logical conclusion because if your life doesn't have inherent dignity and value as given by God, then you must create it out of and for yourself. Honest atheists admit this:

Stephen Jay Gould:

“We cannot read the meaning of life passively in the facts of nature. We must construct these answers ourselves – from our own wisdom and ethical sense. There is no other way.”

Constructing our own meaning is an exercise in frustration. I do believe this is one aspect of the profound level of anxiety in our society. Viktor Frankl writes: “Ever more people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for.” But it also frustrates because it is unworkable.

1) What happens when we have conflicting meanings? When your “truth” or your value conflicts with my “truth” and my values. Who or what is the judge when we have no objective viewpoint to judge from?

2) The problem of irrelevance

It doesn't take long to realize that our personal meanings doesn't change the world around us.

This is not to say that non-Christians don't find meaning in this life. Humans are remarkably resourceful. We do create all kinds of “sources” for meaning: personal achievement, material possessions, love and family, community

service, power and authority, etcetera; in other words, a mix of good and bad things. The problem is none of things are designed to provide us our ultimate meaning – even the really good things. Thank God for the many good gifts he gives, but none of them are absolutely trustworthy. When the meaning of our life is based upon these “earthly” things, they are bound to fail us.

(3) Morality:

The Russian writer Dostoyevsky, in his classic work *Crime and Punishment*, tells the story of Raskolnikov, a young man who rejects the existence of God. Sadly, the young man murders an elderly woman. Much of the novel is a working out of the resulting internal conflict of Raskolnikov: on the one hand, if there is no God then who will judge; there is no absolute right or wrong, he knows he should not feel guilty. But he does. Even as he sometimes impulsively does random acts of kindness, he is consumed with guilt until he ultimately confesses and gives his life to God. It is a great illustration of a fundamental truth: we are moral creatures. That is to say we are conscious of moral obligation: a deep sense that some of our thoughts, words, and deeds are good; and that some of them are bad. This is the human condition, a condition other worldviews have difficulty explaining. Why do we struggle to do what is right, even though we have a deep sense of moral obligation? And even though we fail, why do we aspire to do good? Even things that are against self-interest, like heroic acts, or charitable giving.

Outside of Christ, we are left with the futility of our own efforts toward righteousness, or the denial of God and meaning such that we can justify personal morality.

Aldous Huxley:

“I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in a way that they find most advantageous to themselves ... For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation, sexual and political.” (*From Ends and Means*)

Eccl 3:11 “he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

Stuart McAllister puts it this way: “We have infinite longings but finite capacities. The human condition without God is one of restlessness and torment.”

Again Paul addresses this in today’s text:

Col 1:20:

“and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.”

1 John 4:10

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Romans 5:8

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

No other worldview can explain and provide true hope for the human condition. God executes justice **and** extends mercy.

(4) Destiny:

Col 1:21-22

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him”

CS Lewis:

“If I find myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Atheistic worldview: this physical life is all there is. Many today do not want to consider the possibility of an “afterlife”; they say, “I don’t want to live forever.” On the one hand they feel that it liberates them from religious and moral obligation, but on the other hand, any sober 2nd thought reinforces the meaninglessness of it all if we all merely return to the dust. In the movie, *The Wolverine*, the main character lives outside of time, and struggles to make sense of his eternal life and the suffering he has experienced. At one point, his mentor, Yashida, says to him, “Your mistake was to believe that a life without end can have no meaning - it is the only life that can.” Our lives are given implicit value by our creator; we are designed with a purpose, and destined to glorify God as image bearers and enjoy him forever!

However, critically, the Christian faith is not a denial of physical life. In fact, Christ as creator, justifier, and goal of his creation not only makes sense of our physical world and lives, it motivates our lives. We serve more ably, and love more deeply, in this life.

John 13:1-15

-Jesus loved us to the end, in spite of all he was facing! And he calls us to do the same. Our believe and hope for an eternity with Christ doesn’t make our



THE STORY OF
Everything
LUKE 24:27

life now meaningless, in fact it inspires us to serve our world all the more – to love them to the end.