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# The Unity of the Spirit

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Dear Fellow-Believers:

*Nineteen Eighty-four* is a novel by George Orwell that tells the story of a world where the ruling authority known as “Big Brother” seeks to control the thoughts and actions of every citizen. In my opinion, this once futuristic novel describes much of our society today. I do not live under a totalitarian government with strict censorship, but it can be asserted that the media and advertising agencies are effectively controlling or at least strongly influencing, how people think and live. From presidential elections to financial decisions to life style choices, millions of people are drifting along through life, allowing their thoughts and actions to be manipulated by the mass media.

Experts on the art of persuasion report that media techniques have developed to the point that someone with skill and determination can manipulate the masses in any way he may wish. This manipulation however is not limited to those who are not Christians. According to pollster George Barna the moral principals and actual practices of most Christians aren’t much different from those of non-Christians. This means that too many Christians have the same fears, desires, and values in life as the non-Christian, and they reap the same worldly fruit. Far too many Christians are unaware of any way

of thinking or living other than that of the secular culture that bombards them with its fears and ideals. But there is another way of thinking and living! In Romans 12:2, the word of God declares:

*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 (NKJV).*

Here’s how some other translations have put it:

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will (NIV).*

*Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (NAB).*

*Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may*

*prove for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God...(Amplified Bible).*

*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed (J.B. Phillips).*

*Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead focus your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. (The Message)*

I think you get the point! Our lost world has its values and standards, its certain ways of thinking and doing things and we must not allow ourselves to be manipulated by these things. We need to break out of the world's "world view" and take on God's "world view." If we do, our lives will be dramatically changed for the better.

The phrase "do not be conformed" is translated from the Greek word suschematizo. It means to be molded or squeezed into a form. In other words we are not to be manipulated or pressured into thinking and thus living like the unbelieving world around us. Rather we are to allow ourselves to be transformed by the renewing of our mind to the Word of God.

The word "transformed" translates the Greek word metamorphoomai. The English word metamorphosis comes from this word. It means to undergo a radical change in composition or in character; to go from one form of life to another, like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. That's the kind of dramatic change we can experience in life!

As followers of Christ we must no longer continue in the thinking patterns and practices of a sinful world. Ephesians 4:17 says,

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind...*

The phrase "futility of their mind" describes the vain, empty or fruitless thinking and living of those whose thought patterns are void of the knowledge of God. That's why we are exhorted to,

*"be renewed in the spirit of your mind,"*

so that we can put off an old fruitless way of life and put on a new fruitful one.

Here is a profound truth: **Ideas have consequences.** What we truly believe in our hearts, we live out in our lives. Having a godly frame of mind, leading to a godly worldview and godly actions, makes all difference in living a spiritually fruitful life. And we want our lives to be full of blessed spiritual fruit The Bible says that,

*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22).*

These are the virtues that will characterize the life of a believer whose mind is renewed. These are the virtues that will enable us to bring glory to God, as we become more and more like Christ. Let's not let "Big Brother" or the worldly news media control our lives, manipulating us to think and live as the rest of the world does. Let's allow the Word of our Father to permeate our hearts so that we can be transformed and,

*"prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

*Chuck LaMattina*

## A Biblical Worldview

By Marilee LaMattina

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Our culture today is awash in a sea of “isms”: pluralism, moral relativism, modernism, post-modernism, and so on. What do they all mean? All of these terms refer to one’s basic philosophical viewpoint or worldview. Simply put, your worldview is comprised of your basic beliefs that guide your everyday life and actions. Any worldview can be analyzed by how it answers three basic questions:

1. Who am I and how did I get here?
2. What’s gone wrong with this world?
3. What can we do to fix it?

For the Christian, the answers to the above questions, in order, would be: Creation, the Fall, Salvation.

But when many other people are asked these questions they offer no real answers. Too many people have a disjointed, confused worldview. They’ve never stopped to examine *why* they believe what they believe. Their beliefs are a hodgepodge of ideas gleaned from traditions passed on by their parents, or something a science teacher taught them years ago, or yesterday’s Oprah show, or the latest advice from the most recent self-help bestseller. But the way we *act* is directly related to the way we *think*. If our minds are cloudy and fragmented with bits and pieces of contradictory thoughts, our lives will be just as confused.

All these varying worldviews come down to a basic question, “Who makes the rules?” A Biblical worldview demands that we accept the Bible as the absolute and final authority for truth and practice (what we do in response to that truth). The apostle Paul wrote:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for*

*reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV).*

The problem however is that many people don’t accept the Bible as God’s absolute standard for how to live this life He created. Instead, they believe that what is true and right at any given time depends upon the myriad, complex circumstances at that moment. Each person decides what’s true and moral for them at the time based on their unique experiences, viewpoints, and emotions. This is called **moral relativism** and it’s probably the prevailing philosophy for most of your neighbors and co-workers. It’s certainly the dominant worldview in media and music today.

In this philosophy ethical decisions are made based on emotions and not on any sense of an absolute standard of right and wrong. That’s why you’ll often hear statements such as, “I don’t personally think abortion is right, but I’d never want to impose my values onto someone else.”

God, in contrast, clearly lays out a right path, which leads to life and a wrong path, which leads to death (Deuteronomy 30). When people reject God’s Word and make up their own rules, physical and moral chaos result. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to develop a Biblical worldview. We are to view *every* area of life through the focus of the Bible. The apostle Peter tells us that,

*{God} 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).*

As we make the Bible the focus of all of our thinking and decisions, as we make Christ the Lord of all aspects of our life, our worldview will be unified, not fragmented. The result will be wholeness in all our thinking and living.

So how does one develop this Biblical worldview? Since God’s Word covers all that we need to know pertaining to life and

godliness, the Bible itself gives us the curriculum to follow. This curriculum can be divided into five major points:

1. Love God
2. Abide in His Word
3. Renew your mind and be transformed
4. Meditate on His Word
5. Act!

Let's look at each of these individually. First, Deuteronomy 6:4 gives us the command about loving God. It states:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."*

Jesus, in Mark 12:30, when quoting this verse, adds the word "mind." In short, every fiber of our being is to be dedicated to loving God.

Second, we are to abide in God's Word (John 8:31, 32). Abiding implies continually studying the Bible, and thinking and acting according to its truths (Psalm 1).

The third part of developing a biblical worldview is to have our minds renewed by the Word of God. Romans 12: 1,2 commands us to

*"be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

God calls us away from conformity to the world around us and toward a new way of thinking. We are to control what we think about as the following verses from 2 Corinthians make clear.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4,5)*

When Paul wrote these words, he was surrounded by a culture every bit as secular and ungodly as today. He described the act of controlling and renewing our minds as an act of warfare, a "pulling down of strongholds." Indeed, we *are* in a spiritual battle and we win or lose that battle in our minds. We need to train ourselves to think biblically just as vigorously as a soldier trains for a physical battle. Time spent in Bible reading and prayer sharpens our defenses against the lies of the adversary.

Fourth, we are to meditate on God's Word and let our minds dwell on the truths of the Bible (Psalm 119:15, 97). Finally, we're called to act! We are to share and defend the truth (1 Peter 3:15). Our lives are to be light and salt to a world drowning in darkness and confusion.

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (James 1:22)*

In every action we take, every word we speak, we either advance Satan's grip or we show people a glimpse of the kingdom of God and His delivering power. Christianity cannot be reduced to one segment of our lives such as our daily Bible reading or Sunday church service. Being a Christian means to see everything through a Biblical lens. As we sharpen our focus and make every decision based on the absolute standards of the Bible, we'll realize that having a Biblical worldview is the ultimate reality.

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## The Fruit of Self-Control

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To be like Christ. That should be our goal as believers. But becoming like Christ is neither easy, quick or natural. It is a goal that is impossible for us to achieve on our own. But we can become more like Christ through the power of God's Spirit within us. A continual and progressive transformation can take place in our lives, making us more and more like Christ, as we allow our minds to be renewed by the Word of God, and let the power of His Spirit work within us. Scripture sections such as Romans 12:1, 2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18) make this clear:

*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. 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. 12:1-2).*

*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 (II Cor. 3:18).*

Many of the character traits that show that we are becoming more like Christ can be found in Galatians 5:22, 23 where the "fruit of the Spirit" is described.

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*

This nine-fold fruit springs from our new nature (the gift of the Spirit) as we walk according to God's Word. The last Christ-like

character trait mentioned, self-control, is the focus of this article.

Many of the aspects of our Christian walk can be summed up in the concept of self-control. It is this virtue that gives us victory over worldly thinking and fleshly desires. Do I indulge my desires, appetites and emotions? Or do I walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:5, 12, 13), allowing God to work His good will in my life? Anyone, believer or unbeliever, can discipline his mind and body to obtain certain goals. Athletes do it all the time. But we as believers want more than temporary success in the earthly realm. We are after a spiritual and eternal prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Self-control is not an end in itself. It is a condition of the heart to seek God's will and not our own. The believer who is nourished by the written Word of God and is inspired by God's Spirit can manifest the fruit of the Spirit and realize self-control.

Two accounts in the Bible come to mind when I think of men of God who operated self-control. First, consider Paul in Acts 16:16-18.

*Now it happened as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.*

Imagine Paul being plagued by this girl for many days! The Greek word for "greatly annoyed" is also translated as grieved or greatly disturbed. I'm sure that Paul was itching to act. It would have been perfectly understandable, only human, for Paul to rebuke this girl much sooner than he did. But he waited. By the power

of God's Spirit within him he controlled his impulses and emotions and chose to wait for God's guidance. We can have this self-control also. We must believe that God will give us the knowledge and wisdom to handle any situation we are in. What freedom this brings to our lives! We no longer have to be slaves to our emotions. We can walk by the Spirit having God's divine love and power.

In the gospel of John (11:1-45) we have the account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Verse six reads:

*So, when He [Jesus] heard that he [Lazarus] was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.*

Verse 3 of John 11, told us that Jesus loved Lazarus. Jesus and Lazarus shared a deep and affectionate friendship. I'm sure that Jesus was desperate to go and minister to Lazarus. But instead of running off to help his friend, he waited. Jesus must have truly trusted his Father. He knew that God's timing is always perfect. As a result of Jesus' obedience, an awesome demonstration of God's grace, love and power took place in Lazarus' being raised from the dead. And perhaps Jesus was comforted by this miracle as he looked toward the day when God would raise him up from the dead.

We also must learn to trust God like this and self-control is a major key to our success in doing so. Self-control is one of the greatest qualities that can characterize our lives. It is a powerful spiritual virtue that can help us become more like Christ.

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“And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education, ... reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” [George Washington's "Farewell Address".]

## Biblical Meditation

By Chuck LaMattina

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A few years ago I talked with a Hindu swami about how Hinduism helps one to overcome life's trials and to grow spiritually as compared with Christianity. The swami told me that the Hindu cleanses himself and overcomes life's negative effects through the practice of meditation. The goal is to completely empty the mind of all thoughts. When this occurs (how I don't know, because when you finally realize that your mind is free of all thoughts, you have just had one!) you have overcome negative forces in your life. In response I said that Christians are called to meditation too. But we are not to empty our minds of all thought, rather we are to fill our minds with the living and powerful Word of God.

The art and practice of biblical meditation plays a very important part in our being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). Before Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land, God instructed him on how to insure his success saying:

*This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8 NKJV)*

Meditating on the Scriptures would instruct Joshua in the will of God and help him to prosper and succeed in achieving God's purpose for his life. Meditation is presented in the Bible as an act of worship where we honor God by thinking carefully on His Word in order to live it out fully in our lives. Rather than being some kind of mystical escape mechanism where we pretend to empty our minds and free ourselves of life's negative forces, Christian meditation brings about spiritual renewal and

encouragement so that we can serve God, as well as deal with all the demands of life. Biblical meditation is where we think about God and Christ giving them honor and glory. It is also carefully and diligently thinking through biblical commands and instructions that we may do them.

The focus or object of our meditation is made clear by looking at several sections of Scripture. Most references to meditating, center on the Word of God, as these two examples show.

*Blessed is the man...[whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:1-3)*

*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies (Psalm 119:97, 98)*

These Scriptures show us that our minds are not to be blank slates, they are to be filled with the Word of God. The result will be great spiritual fruit and godly wisdom. Scripture also calls us to ponder the great works of our God. Again the Psalms proclaim:

*I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of all your deeds. (Psalm 77:11, 12)*

*I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. (Psalm 145:5)*

As we think about the great works of God our hearts will automatically fill with awe and wonder at the wisdom and power of our God. The result will be worship. Psalm 8 declares:

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained. What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?*

*O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:3,4,9)*

But not only are the works of God in nature to be thought about, we need to meditate on His great miracles and works of spiritual deliverance. In Romans 8:31 and 32 the apostle Paul wrote:

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

As our minds focus on the greatest work of God, our deliverance from the power and penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ, we strengthen our hearts to believe in God for further blessings of His grace. Rehearsing the records of God's power in behalf of His people will cause our confidence and trust in God to grow. The loftiest objects of our meditation however is God Himself and His Son, Jesus Christ. David, in Psalm 63 wrote:

*When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help; therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. (vss. 6,7)*

After Israel was redeemed from slavery in Egypt, Moses sang:

*Who is like You, O LORD among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*

When we take time to think about God Himself, His holiness, His power, His righteousness, mercy, wisdom, knowledge and love, these awe inspiring truths will inspire us to

greater faith, worship and service. In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul encourages us to greater spiritual growth by saying:

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (vss. 1-4)*

To set our minds on things above means to think about the blessings and privilege we have because of our union with Jesus Christ. Therefore we are to focus on him as our righteousness, our wisdom, our justification, our strength and our sure and certain hope of glory! How wonderfully our lives would be enhanced if we practiced the principle of biblical meditation.

Let me encourage you to make time every day to meditate on the things of God. Read the Bible and when you come to a section that brings you comfort and hope or challenges you to change your attitudes and actions, take the time to think through what you are reading. Let it digest in the depth of your soul. Jeremiah said:

*Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart (Jeremiah 15:16)*

Ask God to show you how you can apply what you have learned, and then do so as soon as possible to reinforce the truth you have learned.

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of a good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. The things which you have*

*learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8, 9)*

## Biblical Absolutes and Situational Ethics

One of the most important areas of Christian living pertains to practical decision-making in the light of biblical absolutes. The two basic absolutes of the Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and, then, to love our neighbor as ourselves. All ethical decisions should be made based upon these biblical absolutes. Through reading and meditating on the scriptures together with the guidance of God's Spirit we are able to understand *how* to do this in practical everyday living. This is a fulfillment of the OT promise of the new covenant where God promised to write his laws – via his Spirit - on the minds and hearts of his people. It is this mind of Christ, or law of Christ, based upon knowledge of the scriptures and the indwelling guidance of God's Spirit that enables believers to “discern” or “ascertain” or “determine” the will of God in everyday life situations. That is the meaning of the Greek word “dokimazein” in Rom. 12:2 and in Phil 1:9-10 as follows:

*Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, so that you may **ascertain** what is the will of God ... (Rom. 12:2).*

*This I pray that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight so that you may **determine** what really matters ... (Phil. 1:9-10).*

As we “walk by the Spirit” – that is, by the “mind of Christ” – we have as Oscar Cullman stated, “the capacity of forming the correct ethical judgment at each given moment;” or, as James Dunn states, “the sense or instinct for what is right and appropriate in any given situation.”

## Notes and Quotes on the Bible

### The Mind-Set of the Believer

#### World-Views of History

If there is one thing that the history of the twentieth century has taught us it is that *ideas* matter. The two most destructive forces of this century – Nazism and Communism – were both based on fundamental *ideas* and corresponding *world-views* that guided and controlled the thoughts and actions of the leaders and followers of those movements. In each case it can be plausibly argued that these *ideologies* – which were in effect *secular religions* - came into existence and gained popularity because of a spiritual vacuum that existed due to the failure of the Christian societies in which they took hold to practice *biblical* Christianity. The result was untold suffering and horror for many, many millions of people, including some 150 million dead. Far from being a century of progress, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was, by far, the most destructive century in the history of mankind.

Of course, in another sense there *has* been great progress in this century. But much depends on how we define progress. If we speak of progress in science, technology, or even, in gaining human or civil rights, there has been undeniable progress in this century – especially in the last 50 years. But if we are speaking of moral or spiritual progress – based on biblical standards of becoming Christ-like – the last century has been amongst the worst in history.

Here, then, we come to the crucial issue of world-view: by whose world-view, or standards, do we judge progress? Do we judge by God's standards? Or, do we judge by the standards of

other religions? Or, do we judge by the standards of modern scientific and secular man?

Of course, for Christians the answer is obvious: we judge by God's standards as recorded in the Bible. Nevertheless, it is useful to put matters in historical perspective in order to understand the issue of world-view from a biblical point of view. Throughout history there have been three basic ways of looking at the meaning of history and the meaning of life. In other words, there have been three basic world-views. As a history teacher I usually begin my history classes by explaining these different 'philosophies of history' to my students so as to add relevance to what we're studying. Although there is often overlap of these world-views in practice, it is still useful to look at each of them on their own merits. We can list them as follows:

1. The Judeo-Christian, or monotheistic, concept of history. This concept of history as taught in the Bible declares that a sovereign, loving, and personal God created the world. It was created with a specific purpose in mind and is being guided to the fulfillment of that purpose by that same God. This view includes the ideas that man was created in God's image, that man is responsible to God for living in accordance with God's will, and that man will one day give an account of himself to God at the final judgment. In this view the world was created good but was corrupted by sin – from which all the problems of mankind have stemmed. However, a time is coming when God will rectify this situation, and it is toward this specific point in time that all history is moving.
2. The mythological, or polytheistic, view of history. This is characterized by ancient Greco-Roman, Oriental, or even, Barbarian mythologies. It includes not only the religious ideas of the Greeks, Romans,

Egyptians, Sumerians, Norse, and Celts, but also, the Indians of the Americas and so on. From a biblical perspective this view of history is a perversion or degradation of the biblical view and one can see many forms of it in the biblical accounts of both the Old and New Testaments. One need only compare the different creation accounts of antiquity with the biblical view to see the glaring differences. The gods of mythology were, in effect, made in the image of sinful man. They had human characteristics and were constantly in competition with each other. They were often capricious, could be placated or manipulated by people, and, they were no clearer on the meaning of life than your average person today. In this view of life, history is not going anywhere and the best one can do is to hope that the real and immortal 'self' or 'soul' will 'escape' to some outer realm of 'eternity' – or something similar - at death. From this view comes our modern new age movement – perhaps in combination with number 3 below – as well as all forms of magic, astrology, eastern religions, and, unfortunately, much that has been mixed into many present-day forms of Christianity as well.

3. The evolutionary, or atheistic, view of history. This began in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with the publication of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, though it had some precursors in other forms in earlier years. This view of history – as seen from a purely scientific point of view - is based on the ideas that life and the universe have come about by accident and, therefore, with no specific or guiding purpose in mind. Evolution simply progresses through natural selection and the result is the survival of the fittest. It is this view of history that is the most influential in educational and academic circles today. But, it should be firmly noted that the two most destructive forces of our

century – Nazism and Communism – were specifically based on the evolutionary view of history. And, it is difficult to disagree that if this world-view is correct then the view, “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” – i.e., hedonism - is logically a valid option for life. If evolution in its atheistic form is true, then on what possible basis can any moral or ethical system be built or justified? The only valid outcome of such an evolutionary view is *moral relativism* - any opinion about ethical values is of no more validity than any other opinion since, without a God, there are no absolute moral standards at all.

## The Christian World-View

The Christian world-view as presented in the New Testament contrasts sharply with the mythological, evolutionary, and even, traditional institutional Christian views. It is based on the Jewish conception of the two ages that was taken up and expanded on by Christ and his disciples. According to the New Testament, the present age, running from Adam to Christ, is marked by sin, evil, and death. In fact, the present age is not only characterized as evil and controlled by “the god of this age,” but it is also in the process of “passing away.” In contrast, the future age – the age of the kingdom of God – is marked by glory, honor, and immortality. It will be manifested in all its glory at Christ’s return, but, it is already at work in this present age by the power of God’s Spirit – the first installment of that coming age.

The New Testament envisions no hope for permanent peace in this age, or, of a restoration of this world apart from God’s redemptive work in Christ. From the New Testament perspective, the *only* hope for individuals, or for the created world as a whole, is what God accomplishes in Christ. This truth is set forth clearly in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenlies with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.*

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:3-10).*

The believer's proper response to God's grace in Christ is to live according to the new standards, goals, and mind-set of all that God *has, is, and will* accomplish in Christ. These truths are set forth clearly in Romans chapter 12 and II Corinthians 3:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world [age], but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve [discern, ascertain] what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2 NIV).*

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being*

*transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

The perspective of these verses is based on the truth that “in Christ” the Christian believer has already entered into the blessings of the age to come - even while still continuing live amidst the sin, decay, and mortality of this present evil age. This new mode of life, outlook, and living - in Christ - is “counter-culture” to the worldly standards of this age. Believers are moving to towards a known destination and goal – the glory that will be revealed at Christ's return (Rom. 8:18-25). Therefore, we are to renew our minds to this truth and be transformed by the power of God's Spirit within us. This is the goal of the Christian life – to become like Christ! The process of glorification begins in this age, through the renewed mind walk and transforming power of God's Spirit. But, it will only be completed in all its glory at Christ's return.

### **The Mind-Set of the Believer**

For those who are now in Christ there is a new *life*, a new *world-view* of life, and a new way of *living* life. The old ways of living, thinking, and acting are said to be “in Adam” or “in the flesh”. But these have been superseded by a new mode of existence “in Christ” or “in the Spirit.” Therefore we are to set our minds on the things of the Spirit and to walk, or live, according to the Spirit. Paul's Letters to the Romans and Galatians set forth this mode of life in Christ and the corresponding mind-set of the believer:

*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to the Spirit.*

*For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

*For the **mind set on the flesh is death, but the **mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:1-6 NASB; cf. Gal. 5:16-23).*****

As Christian believers we must keep our eyes on the goal of becoming like Christ both in this life and, ultimately, in the life to come. As we do this we will walk according to the Spirit and be transformed by the renewing of our minds to be like Christ. Apart from Christ there

is no hope for this world and we must not allow ourselves to be caught up into its false beliefs, standards, and goals. Let us keep our minds set on the Christ-like life and live according to the Spirit. As we do so, we will reap the matchless benefits of “life and peace.”

*Richie Temple*

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