



Understanding Another Worldview

Part II

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In Part I in the previous issue we noted that a worldview is how we view the world around us; it is the core of our value system. Our beliefs and behavior flow out of the way we think in our hearts. Our culture and upbringing shape our worldview. Some values line up with Scripture, but some values do not. In some cultures it is okay to lie to save face for your family or community. Yet this is contrary to the Bible. The gospel goes beyond just saving our souls; it changes our lives and makes all things new. This is a work that God does in the life of each believer, doing it from the inside out as He brings conviction to our hearts. Our aim is to have God's view on *all* things.

Also in the first part we looked at the physical example of food. We saw the clear differences between the way Konkombas and Americans view food. The values of each group were shaped over many years by the availability of food, the ease or difficulty of producing or acquiring it, famine, etc. The Konkombas take great care in preparing food and serving it respectfully, because for them it is hard work and not always readily available. On the other hand, most Americans have never experienced starvation, and with our history of prosperity, we take food for granted. We have an abundance, and even great variety.

In entering a new and different culture, we saw that if you are not sensitive about the other's worldview, you might get offended or

offend others. This could cause strained relationships and damage to the gospel. Understanding the values of others will help you work through these difficulties.

Animist Worldview of Sin

In this article we will look at some spiritual aspects of worldview. This brings us to a crucial part. In fact, if we fail to understand another's worldview when we are teaching him spiritual things, we may end up with syncretism, not conversion.

Syncretism is adding truths to your worldview rather than changing your worldview. For example, as an American I can hand food to another person with two hands (as the Konkombas do), but this is not going to change my worldview about food. I simply added to my behavior the outward practice of how I handle food without changing my heart attitudes about food. The same can also happen spiritually.

There is one vital concept we must understand if we are going to come to God: SIN! Do you know that there are many worldviews on sin? Interestingly, there's no word for *sin* in many languages, or the word *sin* means something vastly different than the biblical concept of sin. If you just move into the Konkomba culture and (without changing the worldview) start preaching "stop sinning," what you are meaning to them is "stop offending various people's taboos."

There is a vast distance between the biblical view of sin and the animist worldview. At the core of their worldview, animists believe that every soul that exists also preexisted in eternity past with God in the land of the ancestors. There is no heaven and hell in their mindset. All dead people go to the land of ancestors, and that is where the Creator God is.

In their worldview when it came time for them to be created in the world, they went to God and asked Him if they could choose their destiny, and God said "yes." Maybe they said to God that they would like to marry two wives, bear seven children, and have a farm. That in their view is being a good individual. So God agreed and allowed that man to go.

Some other souls, by way of evil contracts with evil spirits or by influence of witches, are outside the realm of the world of the ancestors, but occasionally make parasitical visits. So by the influences of witches (who came to God and asked to be something evil), others became evil (e.g., a murderer, a thief, a rapist); to those God also agreed, sending them into the world. That is the Konkomba concept of predestination.

The values then are placed upon pleasing the ancestors, because the ancestors exist in this world, and existed in the previous world. To the Konkombas all of the future moves to the past. When you die, you go back to the ancestors. So their eyes are always turned backward.

Their belief is that sin is "offending anything that the ancestors would not like." I'm not talking just about moral sins here; this extends even down to the foods you eat. If the ancestors prefer the chicken to be butchered a certain way, to not do it that way would be offending that taboo.

This belief leads to a behavior that has little consciousness of guilt for moral sins. It results in a fatalistic mentality. In other words, when you see a man who is a thief, you can only think, "That's terrible." But what can you say, for "he was born a thief."

This is the backdrop we find upon entering this culture. If we just come with an American gospel saying, "Repent of your sins," what sins are they going to repent of? It will be those "sins" of offending the ancestors (going against the tribal norms).

Missionary's Cultural Worldview

The missionary also has a cultural worldview of repentance that may not be necessarily biblical. For example, to some of us the word *repent* is automatically tied to a meeting where a soft song is sung at the end and people stand to their feet, walk down a long row, and kneel in front of a speaker's platform. They go with a counselor to a private room and kneel down and pray. That may be what comes to our mind when we think of repentance.

If we add this thing called "altar-call-repentance" to the Konkomba culture, they will do

Traditional Konkomba view of sin

Worldview – pre-chosen destiny

Values – pleasing the ancestors (who are in the God-world)

Beliefs – sin is entering someone's taboo, or breaking away from the pattern of the tribal norm

Behavior – fate-based mentality, lack of personal responsibility, minimized guilt

Biblical View of Sin

Worldview – original man created without sin; free will

Values – man born in sin; God is perfect, holy

Beliefs – sin keeps us from God; a holy life is possible only in Christ

Behavior – man is responsible; repentance, turning, living right

what they feel is expected of them. But as you watch their life, you will find it clashes with the biblical worldview. They have simply added a new behavior onto their worldview. Deep down inside, the idea that sin is going against the tribal norm has not changed. We end up with syncretism (mixing)—not conversion.

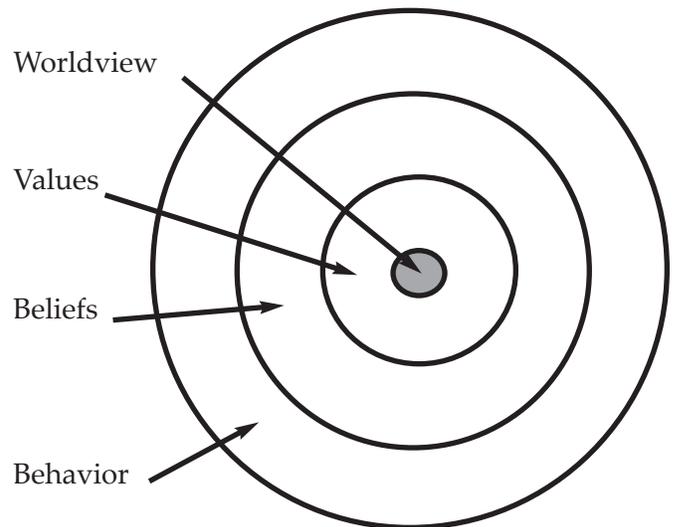
Core Conversion

Where does it go wrong? The core is wrong; thus, all that works out from that core is in error. The behavior reflects the wrong thinking in his heart. The problem is with the Konkomba's worldview of sin and must be replaced with a true change of heart. God wants to change from the inside and burst outward in newness of life. God wants to change the worldview!

The term *worldview* is not in the Bible, but there are many passages in the Bible that speak about our inward parts. Jeremiah 17:10, right after that verse on the deceitful heart, it says, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins...." We use reins to drive a horse; the reins are what steers everything. God searches that which governs our values and our behavior—this is the worldview. The rest flows out of this. The verse goes on to speak about a man's ways (beliefs) and his fruit (behavior). Do you see the pattern? God doesn't just look at the behavior. He sees right through to the core.

Psalm 5:8-9 has the same pattern: "...Make thy way straight..."—that's their behavior. "...Their **inward part** is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue." In the Hebrew language that phrase *inward part* means "the kidneys"; the Jews considered that the most inward part. The Konkombas call it "the stomach." They refer to it more like the Greeks do: "the bowels." The Bible also uses the analogy of "the heart." Nevertheless, it is the inner part that directs you.

Psalm 64:2: "Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked..." (David's enemies). "They encourage themselves in an evil matter... They



say, 'Who shall see them?' They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep" (verses 5, 6). David says, "My enemies want to slay me." But rather than directing his words to the behavior (murder) David goes directly to the inward thought, the inward part, and says "the heart is deep." There is a deep-seated falseness to their pattern of behavior.

God tells us in Proverbs 23:7, "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he...." There is a direct connection between the worldview and the behavior. Many will change their behavior—but are we going to be content with only behavior change? No, because God is going to say, "I never knew you."

"Lord, but we did many wonderful works!"

"I never knew you."

Somehow their worldview did not change. (See Mt. 7:21-23.)

Look at David's prayer of repentance, after he fell into grave sin: "Behold, Thou desireth truth in the inward parts..." (Psalm 51:6). David sees that it is not just his behavior that is wrong, but that God wants truth inside him. Truth is the eradication of falsehood. Then what springs from within will be a holy behavior that God so desires. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22).

Biblical Worldview of Sin

We looked at the animist worldview of sin, now let's look at it from a biblical worldview. Sin originated at the fall of man. Was it a predestined choice of God? No, the choice was totally man's. God created man perfect, but man broke his part of the covenant. God's values always were, and still are, perfection. That leads to a belief that only God can enable us to live a holy life. It is not by fate, and that translates into a behavior that says, "I will, by the power of God living in me, live a holy life." That is the biblical worldview of sin.

From where in the Bible are we going to teach to correct the animist worldview of sin? We are going to use Genesis to show them the beginnings, the Law (Exodus) to show them sin and holiness, the Old Testament stories to show God's justice and faithfulness, and the Gospels to show them Jesus! The Epistles will then come in for discipleship. God's Word is beautiful; it is all there!

Example of Slavery

Let's look at one of the ugliest behaviors known to man: slavery.

Here in the U.S., the government stepped in with force in the late 1800s and cut off the behavior called "slavery." They have the right to do that; the book of Romans tells us they do not bear the sword in vain. But did they change people's hearts or their worldviews?

The Worldview of Slavery

Worldview – a man should advance at the expense of others

Values – on things and success, disvalue of people

Beliefs – people are to be used for one's own purposes, some people are worth more than others

Behavior – slavery

No. So now we have new behaviors that were added, such as:

- ◆ "kill" the competition
- ◆ underpaid migrants
- ◆ the idea that a CEO of a company might make 10-50 times the salary of the employees

All of these behaviors are fruits coming from the same root. The ax was not laid to the root of the tree. Are these behaviors as bad as slavery? Maybe not. But they are from the same old worldview that has not changed.

Did you know that slavery existed in the early church? Roman and Jewish individuals who owned slaves started getting born again. What did Paul do? Did he publish an Emancipation Proclamation? We cannot find any verse where he did something like that. Rather, he showed them a totally different worldview: "*Let each esteem others better than himself*" (Phil. 2:3b). Paul taught them to love each other so much they would die for each other. This made the slaveholders take another look at their master-servant relationships.

Look at the beautiful story of Philemon. Onesimus was a runaway slave whom Paul refused to "harbor." He sent him back to his master. Was Paul right in doing this? Did he give Master Philemon a sermon about Christians not owning slaves? Paul writes to him, "*Receive him as myself.*" In other words, "Philemon, treat this slave as you would an apostle." I personally believe that Philemon's worldview changed, and he quit having slaves.

Animism and Marriage

There are many other areas we could talk about. At the center of the animist worldview of marriage is a concept that the tribe must be advanced at all costs. If the tribe or clan ever ceases through war or anything else, who will sacrifice to the ancestors? And if the ancestors are not pleased, their whole history will crumble. This in turn affects how one chooses a wife.

She must be able to bear children for her husband and be capable of working on his farm. If she can't do this, she is of lesser worth. As with slavery, people are used for one's own purposes, and some people are worth more than others.

This belief creates such behavior as: no communication between husband and wife, wife beating, polygamy, and other marriage problems. It comes from the fact that they don't have a biblical understanding of marriage. But when they find Christ and learn the biblical worldview, they discover that the wife is the husband's soul-meet! She is an heir together with him of the grace of God! She was created for her husband, to be together with him in the kingdom. Wow! Then you begin getting a whole new set of values, and a whole new behavior pattern comes out of that. But it must take place in the inner man.

Change is Happening From Within!

We can be so easily be blinded by our own worldview. Our tendency is to look at another

people and see where they fall short. It is hard to look at our own culture objectively. But the Bible is effective in changing our worldview. We need the whole counsel of God.

We are seeing the kingdom of God break forth among the Dagombas and Konkombas. It starts where they are. God's Spirit within them expresses Himself to them. It is beautiful! This is not an implantation; this is genuine from within, springing outward from a new worldview. Even their songs and meeting styles are beginning to reflect this! But we must be patient. It will take time. The growth process is going to be slower. The Konkomba worldview is far from the biblical one. Bible knowledge alone is not going to change it. God desires truth in the inward parts.



This article was adapted from a message given at the 2005 Missions Conference. The complete taped message is available from the tape ministry.