

The Whole Gospel for the Whole of Life

A Study Guide on a Reformational Worldview

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Introduction

This series of study outlines is intended to be used as a basic introduction to a distinctively Christian worldview that seeks to see the whole gospel applied to the whole of life.

What do we mean by a worldview?

A worldview is simply "the comprehensive framework of one's significant beliefs about things and their relationships." Thus anything it is possible to have a significant belief about can be included in a worldview. These beliefs form a framework, which holds these beliefs together in a particular way, functioning as a model or pattern for interpreting the world around us. And a worldview is made up of beliefs, not feelings or opinions, since beliefs make a claim to some kind of knowledge about the way things are. Beliefs can be defended with arguments, but feelings can not. Also, beliefs are not merely opinions, but something about which we have strong convictions because we see them as important, that is, significant for life. A worldview is not trivial or irrelevant.

Thus our Christian faith can be presented in the form of a worldview: as "the comprehensive framework of one's significant beliefs about things and their relationships." What do we as Christians believe is really significant? Do these beliefs form a comprehensive framework or not? What are the kinds of things in the world; how are they related, and to what are they related?

This Christian worldview makes a difference, because it is significant for our life in the world. It shapes and directs our lives in important ways, because it is the framework of our most basic beliefs about everything.

This series of studies is an initial introduction to the idea that Christianity provides a coherent, robust and significant basis for life that is a distinctive and genuine alternative to the prevailing worldviews which currently shape our society.

No doubt there will be many questions arising out of these studies that cannot be dealt with in an initial outline such as this. Such questions can be followed up in some of the material mentioned in the reading list at the conclusion.

Part 1

A Transforming Faith

Christianity is for every day!

Christian faith is not just for Sundays, to be dusted off once a week! If we think it has nothing to contribute to the nitty-gritty affairs of life, or the needs of an ordinary everyday world, that is because we have not grasped the radical life-changing nature of Christian faith.

We are called to a down-to-earth faith which seeks the radical transformation of the world around us. We are to be transforming the world, not transformed by the world.

Romans 12:1-2

These verses urge us not to be conformed to the world, but through having our mind renewed to be transformed instead.

1. What does it mean to have our mind renewed?
2. How does this lead to being transformed?
3. What should we be transformed into?

Ephesians 4:22-24

Here we read some more about having our minds renewed. It speaks about the attitude of the mind being made new, and spells out in terms of everyday life what that means.

The Ephesians were to put off the old self, corrupted with evil desires, in order to be made new in the attitude of the mind, so as to be able to put on the new self: one of righteousness and holiness, that is, like God.

1. How does this affect our thinking and study?
2. Is the transformation of our thinking only with regard to morality?

A vision and a goal

Christian faith provides us with a vision and goal for the whole of life. Often our perspective is narrowed down to the activities of the church and personal piety. Valid though these are, if that is all Christianity means for us, then we have missed seeing its true meaning.

The Christian faith guides and directs us to engage in obedient service before the Lord in every area of life. There are no part-time Christians! No area of life can be cut off from God except as a delusion under the influence of sin.

Serving the Lord in every area of life means that education, art, music, economic activity, social life, politics and media, both work and play - everything we do is to be radically transformed by Christ.

Bob Goudzwaard identifies the three basic Biblical laws as:

1. Every person is serving god(s) in his or her life.
2. Every person is transformed into an image of his or her god.
3. Humankind forms a structure of society in its own image.

Which of the following Biblical texts are the basis of which law?

1. 1 Kings 14:22-24
2. 1 Kings 15:11-15
3. Psalm 115:2-8
4. Romans 1:22-25
5. Romans 1:28-29
6. Romans 12:2
7. 2 Corinthians 5:15
8. Ephesians 4:20-24
9. Philippians 3:17-21

The Scriptures give perspective

The Scriptures do not give us a collection of ethical commands or theological doctrines, but the perspective which is to shape how we are to live as God's obedient and faithful stewards.

If the Scriptures were simply a collection of ethical commands, these would be limited by the culture in which they were given. For instance, what would Moses have made of IVF (in vitro fertilisation) or stem cell research? Are these important issues for Christians? If so, what help can the Scriptures be if they never mention them?

Rather than a set of ethical commands, the Scriptures present us with a transforming vision of the relationship between God and human beings as his creation, and how that relationship has been distorted through sin. As a consequence the relationship between human beings and other creatures is also distorted. From Scripture we learn how we should view ourselves, the world around us, God, and the relationships between all these things.

The Scriptures give us the only true and faithful presentation of how we should view the world and every aspect of our lives, that is, a distinctively Christian "world and life view" or more commonly, simply "worldview."

2 Timothy 3:10-17

1. What does Paul mean when he says that the Scriptures are able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"?
2. What is "salvation" in this context?
3. What are the "good works" that the Scriptures are given to equip us for? Compare this passage with Ephesians 2:10.
4. If we limit the teaching of Scripture to doctrinal and moral issues, where do we find the direction we need for other areas of life? What authority can such alternatives have in comparison with Scripture?

This world is God's world!

Why have we been put on this earth? Some Christians see concern for the environment as a "worldly" issue, and that we should not make ourselves at home here. After all, our true home is in heaven, isn't it?

God created the earth as a home for an abundance of living things, including human beings. God made the earth to be our home, and we are called by God, as the head of the creation, to care for and develop the earth, the home in which we live, which God has entrusted to us. We are not placed here to serve our own interests, or as a preparation for heaven, but as the stewards of God, called to care for and develop the earth that he has created for himself.

The earth is not our possession. So while we are called to develop the earth, mining its minerals, cutting down its trees, building roads and cities and factories, we are to care for the earth and treat it with respect. It is entrusted not simply to our generation but to all humankind, for as many generations as will live upon the earth until the return of Christ, whenever that may be.

So if we pollute and contaminate and exploit the earth, we will come under judgement from God for violating his world and violating the trust he placed in us. The earth is not ours to do with as we like. It belongs to God, and we must treat it with care, preserving its many creatures and enabling them to live in the earth that God has given them for their home. We must also enable human beings to live with freedom and dignity and thus be able to carry out their part in the task of nurturing and exploring the earth. The whole realm of creation is his concern, and by destroying God's creation we are showing contempt for the Creator, and denying the Lordship of Christ.

Genesis 1:26, 2:15, Psalm 8

1. How are we to carry out our tasks as God's stewards as expressed in these passages?
2. Does it mean we have to be "greenies" or is there more to it than that? Does it mean something other than that?
3. How can we today care for this earth and its creatures and develop its riches in the service of God?
4. Why does the New Testament not seem to give the same attention to "environmental" issues?

Will being at home on this earth lead to idolatry?

It is a false spirituality which seeks to be released from the earth to be in heaven instead. Being at home on this earth in which we live is not incompatible with Christian faith. This world is God's world, and God has placed us here to care for it and love it. It is not wrong to love what God loves! Any desire to avoid caring for the earth is a desertion from the post God has appointed for us.

Nothing in God's world can lead us away from God, or interfere with our relationship with God, unless we treat it as an idol - as a god in itself which gives meaning and purpose to life. All creatures are servants of God and have meaning and purpose only because God gives it to them. They cannot serve as the source of meaning themselves.

In Scripture idols are false gods that are no gods at all, a sign of the rejection of the living God, and his replacement with a substitute god of our own devising. An idol is not simply something we are too involved with, into which we put a lot of time or energy. What makes something an idol is its substitution for the living God. To elevate one of God's creatures to the source of meaning, purpose and direction in our lives is what it means to worship an idol.

Romans 1:18-23

1. What can we learn from this passage about the dynamics of paganism?
2. What is going on in pagan religion? Why do people worship idols?

Isaiah 44:9-20, Psalm 115:1-11

The Scriptures ridicule those who worship idols, because of the powerlessness of the idol, and because of the folly of worshipping a perishable creature. These idols can't even hold themselves up: they have to be nailed into position so they don't fall over [Isaiah 41:7].

1. How do passages such as these unmask the power of idolatry in our lives?
2. In what way(s) can idolatry be a delusion?

Is everyday life a necessary evil?

Instead of Christians being at home on the earth, many of them wish to have as little to do with it as possible. They mistakenly see earthly activities as "unspiritual."

But we cannot avoid being involved in such activities as eating, building houses, making clothes, organising banking systems, and so on. Do we then simply do these as "necessary evils" and regard them as distractions from the real purpose in life? Are they essentially meaningless and a waste of time?

If not, how should we be carrying out such activities? Is our Christian faith at all related to such things, or are we free to act as we like when doing "unspiritual" activities? What does this imply for the Lordship of Christ in our lives? Whose rules do we follow in such cases?

Deuteronomy 6:4-12

1. Why are the Israelites told to discuss the laws of God with everyone and everywhere they go?
2. Why should they write them on the gates and door-frames of their houses? Was this simply a superstitious attempt to get God to protect their houses? Was it a pious sentiment?
3. God promised to give them houses, fields, vineyards and olive groves so that they would have enough to eat and be satisfied.
4. Would God promise such *unspiritual* blessings if these were a distraction to a truly *spiritual* life?
5. What does it mean today to remember the Lord in these situations?

Everyday life a blessing from God

God placed us on this earth to care for it, and to explore and develop it. But he also gave us this earth to enjoy and delight in. Why should this not be the case - after all, God himself delights over the world he has made.

The book of Proverbs speaks of Wisdom participating in the creation with God. This Wisdom is another way of speaking about Christ, through whom all things were made. He is himself the Wisdom of God [1 Corinthians 1:24]. This Wisdom says in Proverbs 8:30-31,

Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world, and delighting in mankind.

Since God himself delights in his world and in humankind, why should we, his creatures, find it less than desirable to delight in the earth that God has made for us to care for and live in. would God really expect us to be indifferent to his creation?

Psalm 8

This Psalm speaks of the place of humankind in God's creation, and the task which God has given us.

1. What does this Psalm teach us about our relationship with the rest of God's creatures?
2. Why is God's name majestic in all the earth? What is the connection between this phrase in the first and last verses and what comes in between?

Psalm 147:8-20

This Psalm speaks of the way God cares for the earth he has made.

1. Why should the provision of food for wild animals and humankind, and God's sovereignty over the weather, be important in a psalm of praise? Should we not rather praise God for more *spiritual* blessings?
2. Why would the Old Testament Israelites find such a theme more natural than many Christians?
3. Why does knowledge of God's laws make a difference in this area?

Part 2

The alternative gospels

Paganism, humanism, dualism

As we saw in our first study, our Christian faith guides us to see the world and our task in it in a particular way, which is faithful to the Scriptures. The Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us back to that perspective, and renews us to live in harmony with it. However, that is not the only gospel being proclaimed in our world. There are alternative gospels which seek to have us live in terms of different, competing visions of the world and of our life. These competing gospels can be grouped together in several categories:

- paganism
- humanism
- dualism

What do we mean by each of these terms?

Before we look at the meaning of these terms, first consider the following questions:

1. On the basis of your current understanding, what do you take each of these terms to mean?
2. Are they terms which you readily use yourselves?
3. Do they usefully describe real beliefs and ways of life, or are they rather obscure and do not mean a great deal to you?

Paganism

The term "pagan" is used here not in a derogatory way, but as a technical term for a particular non-Christian religious outlook. Paganism is a view of the world that is polytheistic (multiple gods) and magically inclined, and identifies the divine with one or more parts, aspects, principles or forces within the creation. It deifies various creatures and sees in them the source of meaning and power for the creation. Paganism is idolatrous religion, which frequently worships representations of the creatures considered divine, and sees the powers of the gods somehow present within the idol.

A pagan worldview expresses a belief in a multiplicity of divine and semi-divine beings which govern the world and the forces within it. Paganism tries to manipulate these beings by magic or religious ritual, and by gaining power over these beings which govern various forces in the world, they can be controlled for personal advantage. Belief in magic comes from a pagan worldview. It is not necessarily associated with Satan worship.

Paganism is obviously incompatible with Christian faith, because all of the things which we can worship or treat as the source of meaning and purpose in life are created by God. As such, they are dependent on God for their own meaning and purpose, and cannot provide meaning or purpose for us. That can come only from God.

Paganism is not an irrelevant issue for us, or of interest only with regard to countries overseas where pagan religions are highly visible. Pagan religion has made a comeback in Western societies. You probably know it as the New Age movement.

Many popular magazines include articles in dealing with New Age ideas such as astrology, palmistry, clairvoyance, etc.

1. What view of the world are these articles promoting?
2. How would you debate with someone who followed New Age teachings?
3. Many computer games and fantasy novels utilise a pagan and magical worldview as their basic scenario. Is it acceptable for Christians to play such games or read books of this kind?
4. Why is a pagan, magical worldview dominant in computer games, which after all utilise an anti-magical, scientific technology? Is there an inconsistency or paradox at work here?

Humanism

The essence of humanism is that it rejects any authority or power outside of human life, and believes that human beings alone have the ability to improve our lives for the better. There is no need of God, or deliverance from sin, or similar Christian beliefs, because we are able to resolve our problems on our own. Faith in God is at best irrelevant (but permissible for consenting adults in private) and at worst detrimental to tackling our own problems by abdicating responsibility to save ourselves. Humanism may be atheistic, although some humanists are Deists (God exists but is not concerned with us and has not given us revelation. Religion is a phenomenon of purely human origin).

The humanist world-view sees everything as secular, with human freedom as the highest good to which we can aspire, and so it rejects any claim that God has sovereignty over us. By developing human powers it aspires to self-realisation and fulfillment.

The French Revolution was the epitome of humanism. The slogan of the revolution was "No God, No Masters." It was a rejection of any authority imposed from outside. Thus the revolutionary principle was:

accept no law save that which you impose on yourself.

1. How can you see this principle at work today? Can you see any part of life it has not influenced in some form?
2. Are you influenced by this principle at all? If so, what can you do about it?
3. What do you see as the alternative to such a view?

Dualism

It is not impossible, because of our sinful nature, for pagan or humanistic ideas and perspectives to function in our thinking and living alongside of Christian faith. In such a case, we are functioning with a dualistic worldview.

Dualism is the acceptance of two separate principles by which we live, and human life is divided into two according to the principles accepted for various parts. In one part of life, we live according to the principle of Christianity, while in another part we accept humanist or pagan principles.

This can be seen in the way we distinguish between the "natural" and the "spiritual." This distinction is based on the idea that in at least part of our lives we can live independently of God and his revelation to us. For instance, in our academic study we can operate on the basis of "reason," while our faith depends on God's "revelation."

For some areas of life, unaided human thought is considered sufficient for us to be able to arrive at the truth. Study of the creation around us, and of human society, is thought to be possible without revelation, because it is immediately accessible to us through use of human reason, applying empirical and experimental techniques to discover the truth.

For our "spiritual" lives, however, we need God to reveal the truth to us, because we cannot discover the truth for that area unaided. Thus the Scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit are necessary for us to be able to learn what we need to know.

Thus God's world is distinguished into two realms, that where reason is pre-eminent, and that where revelation is pre-eminent. This dualism can be expressed in the following word-pairs, which betray an unbiblical way of seeing the world.

Natural	Spiritual
Secular	Sacred
Facts	Values
Reason	Faith
Freedom	Authority
Study	Belief

1. Can you think of other "word-pairs" like those above which divide life into parts on the basis of different principles applying for each part?
2. Do you use these "word-pairs" yourself consciously (deliberately) or unconsciously (without necessarily meaning anything specific thereby)?

Coping with spiritual conflict

Sometimes what we are learning is in direct conflict with what we believe as Christians. How do we deal with this situation?

We have a number of options:

- we can compartmentalise our thinking and living, keeping the two realms of study and faith strictly separate. What is "true" for our studies may not be "true" for our faith, and vice versa.
- we can change to a less threatening subject or discipline, or abandon our studies altogether.
- we can abandon our faith because we can no longer see it as credible as a result of what we have learned.
- we can accept what we are being taught as if it were true, in order to be able to pass the exams and graduate, while secretly denying the truth of what we are learning.

All these options isolate faith from the world of learning, and in this way we lose the integrity and wholeness of human life, lived as one piece before the Lord.

This brings us to the last option,

- we can change the basis of our thinking, in order to bring it into line with our faith.

This option is the one we will explore in more detail shortly.

1. Have you ever felt your faith threatened by something you have learned in your course? How have you reacted to this - using one of the strategies above?
2. If we are learning truth about God's world, can this really be in conflict with what God has revealed in Scripture?
3. Do Christians need to sacrifice their brains in order to believe?
4. Can the Christian faith contribute something distinctive to your studies?

Escaping from dualism

The conflicts which arise as a result of isolating our faith from our studies are based on one simple principle: paganism, humanism and Christianity all demand total allegiance to their governing principles. They are competing, opposing and incompatible ways of seeing the world and our place within it, with their own distinctive character. They are all totality perspectives, which include within their framework the whole of reality. Nothing is in principle excluded.

We do not need to live a split existence in order to cope with the tensions between our Christian faith and our studies. We can instead seek to develop an understanding of a distinctively Christian worldview which is able to guide and direct us in every area of life; not just our personal and private faith, but in everything we do, including our study. Christianity is as total in its perspective as either paganism or humanism.

The christian worldview sees creation as divided not into two realms subject to different principles, but divided into two kingdoms, that subject to God, and that in rebellion against God. The problem is not that some parts of creation cannot be subject to God's sovereign rule, but that they refuse to be subject. God's kingdom encompasses all that exists, even rebellious subjects.

It is possible, indeed necessary, for us to bring all our thinking into subjection to God, and to think in a way which is shaped by his revelation to us, not by the humanistic worldview undergirding studies in our educational institutions.

The humanistic worldview does not have a privileged access to the truth about the world. Christian faith likewise can provide us with a robust and academically credible approach to interpreting the world around us.

Every area of life can be brought into subjection to God and be redeemed through the Spirit by the death and resurrection of Christ. We can see the redeeming grace of God at work in every area of daily life, including our studies, reshaping our thinking and guiding us in our academic tasks.

2 Corinthians 10:5

1. What implications does this have for study? Does it apply to scientific theory, sociology, technology, etc.?
2. What could a Christian perspective in your discipline look like, and how would it differ from a humanistic perspective?

Part 3

What is the purpose of life?

Why are we here?

Many people wonder about the purpose of life. What are human beings here for? Are we here for a purpose at all? Is life actually meaningless in the long run?

Each worldview has its own answers to these questions, and Christianity is no exception.

Before you start on this study, take a few minutes to think about what you think the purpose of life is. Be honest! Why are we here?

Human beings are created beings

The Christian worldview takes as its axiom that human beings are created to serve as the stewards of God, caring for and delighting in the world God has made, and developing its potential in accordance with the norms (guidelines) given in the Scriptures. God has entrusted the whole earthly creation to our care.

We are Christians not so we can develop our spiritual life in preparation for the "next world" but to serve God in renewed obedience in carrying out our original calling of stewardship of the earth. That which is "spiritual" is not incompatible with this world, for the "natural" with which it is contrasted in Scripture is not the earthly creation (nature), but that which is "sinful," that is, rebellion against God.

It is only a dualistic perspective (seeking to accommodate two conflicting principles in our lives) which leads us to see the earthly creation ("nature"), as something in conflict with serving God. But God is not alienated from the things which he has made. It is only sin, and not involvement in created reality, which alienates us from God.

Romans 8:5-14

1. What does this passage teach you about the distinction between the "spiritual" (being led by the Spirit of God) and the "sinful nature"?
2. Does the **nature** which is in conflict with God originate with God?
3. If **nature** is not God's creation, what is it? Where did it come from? Is there another creator besides God?

All creatures serve God

Non-Christian worldviews either denigrate or glorify our human task, reducing its meaning or making it the source of meaning and fulfillment. Either approach fails to understand how our human task is committed to us by God and is to be carried out in his service. It is thus meaningful in itself, but its meaning is not found within it.

God has created all things, and they are all made to serve God, from the stars in the sky to the smallest organisms and mineral grains in the rocks. He has revealed himself to us in and through these things.

Genesis 1

1. What callings has God given to the various creatures in Genesis 1?
2. What is the calling given to human beings in Genesis 1?
3. How does that calling relate to our activity in the world today?

God's revelation through creation

Because of our sin, we fail to recognise and acknowledge what God has called us to do in the world. God has revealed himself through the creation he has made, but we resist and suppress this knowledge (Romans 1:18-20). The Scriptures are given to call us back to our original task, and to point us in the right direction in carrying out that task. They correctly interpret to us the revelation of God himself in the creation. We cannot understand this without the Scriptures to guide us, because our sinful nature leads us into idolatry and deception.

Christians sometimes take this passage from Romans to teach that God is revealing something about the world which can be known through our investigations (sometimes called general revelation). However, this is a mistaken assumption. God is revealing something about himself through the things he has made, namely his eternal power and divine nature. The world is known to us through our activity of learning, which should be guided by the perspective given in Scripture. The knowledge of the world we acquire is not revelation and cannot be treated as such, but it is still legitimate knowledge.

As a result of our sin, we misunderstand the creation around us. Only through the Scriptures can God's creation be truly understood. And the Scriptures supremely witness of Christ, the image of God who perfectly revealed the Father to a sinful human race. In Him are all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, and thus only in Christ can we know God, and the creation that He has made. Christ is thus the key not only to our relationship with God, but also to life itself. Only in Christ does our life make sense, because only in Christ can we see the creation in the light which God alone can give and which alone reveals the true meaning and significance of life.

Colossians 2:2-4

1. What does it mean for all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to be hidden in Christ?
2. Can we truly learn and know anything apart from being faithful to Christ?
3. What are the "fine-sounding arguments" that might deceive us in connection with our academic study?

Colossians 1:21

1. What might this passage teach us about our studies as Christians?

God's revelation through Christ

Christ is the revelation of God to us, so that in Christ, and only in Christ, we can truly know God. But not only do we know God in Christ, we also come to know ourselves. He is everything that the creature should be, for God in Christ became a human being and lived amongst us. He was at home here in this world, and served God as the perfect human being. He recognised and acknowledged his dependence on God for all things, including his very life, and served God in the world that became his home.

Christ became for us the model of what we should be, the renewed image of God.

Colossians 3:9-10, Romans 13:12-14.

1. How are we to be renewed and transformed into the image of Christ?
2. What does this mean for our perspective on life and the world in which we live?

Human beings and being human

In order for us to carry out our human task, we need to know who we are before God. What is a human being, and how do humans function? How are they related to God, how are they related to other creatures, including other human beings, and how does sin distort and corrupt our human nature?

A Christian worldview sees human beings firstly as God's creatures, and seeks to understand them in the light of the Word of God. Non-Christian worldviews seek their understanding of human nature either in human nature itself (humanism), or in other parts of the creation (paganism). Either approach draws us away from God who alone is the true meaning of human life.

The influence of non-Christian worldviews on our view of what it is to be human lies at the root of many conflicts: for instance, what is the place of women in the church, in the home and in the wider community? Our answers often come from deficient views of human nature, defective views of who we are as creatures of God.

Galatians 3:26-4:7

1. What does it mean to be an heir of God? What do we inherit?
2. God does not have any "daughters" because in the Jewish culture it was the sons who inherited. What does it mean for Paul to say that we are all heirs and sons if we have faith?
3. There is often debate in academic circles about whether human nature is genetically or environmentally determined. This is in fact misleading, since the question posits two false alternatives. But what if anything does the Bible tell us about genetic and environmental influence?
4. What do your studies lead you to believe about human nature? How does this conflict with what the Scriptures tell us? How would you resolve the conflict?
5. What do you consider human nature to be?

Individualism

Perhaps the biggest problem we face as Christians in a secularised society is individualism. The human task is a communal task, and to be truly human is to be in communion with God and with other human beings. There are no isolated individuals, only people who shut themselves off from the communal relationships God has placed them in.

Our society is based on an individualistic vision of what it means to be human. Non-Christian worldviews cannot give a coherent perspective in societal life without falling into the equal and opposite errors of individualism and communalism. These give unwarranted importance to either individual freedom or to community responsibility. But a Christian worldview does not simply take a mediating position, coming down the middle. It rejects the basis on which both individualism and communalism are founded.

All human relationships are created by God, but are given specific shape by human beings. As human beings are sinful, the society they shape reflects their sinfulness. Distorted relationships are entrenched in distorted structures and institutions.

A Christian worldview recognises both the created basis for society, and the power and deviousness of sin which has twisted the society we live in. An authentically Christian vision for life must include the redemption of the structures of society as a whole, and not simply of the individuals within that society. Christianity contains within it the impetus for the transformation of the whole of life, and thus also of human relationships and of the structures of society which give those relationships their enduring form. All these are shaped by human beings, and as such are distorted by sin.

But thanks be to God! The consequences of sin have all been dealt with by the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus human society as a whole can be transformed by the Gospel.

Colossians 1:15-20

Here we read that Christ is to have the supremacy in everything.

1. What is Paul saying here about the transformation of the creation through the Gospel? Is it limited in any way?

In Matthew 28:18 Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

1. What does this imply for our life in society?

At the beginning of this study, you were asked to take a few minutes to share with each other what you thought the purpose of life is. Now go back to what you have said and see whether or not you would want to change your views. Can you defend your decision?

Part 4

The way of salvation

What has gone wrong and how can things be put right?

It is undeniable that human life is not the way it should be. Ever since sin entered in, relationships have been marred, lives have been ruined, the creation despoiled and God dishonoured.

We do not now find the creation to be as it was when God brought it into being. Human sin and rebellion against God has infected the entire creation, and drawn it away from obedience to its Master.

A Christian worldview sees the nature of the disharmony and corruption in the world differently to non-Christian worldviews. We do not seek the origin of our problems in genetic makeup, or social conditions, or evolutionary processes, or moral weakness.

The source of the problems in human life can be traced back to alienation from God, an alienation which came about because of rebellion against God - a desire to make our own decisions as to what constitutes right and wrong, that is, sin.

For the Christian worldview, the source of our problems is sin, not our environment, or our unbringing, or our lack of resources or our personality.

James 1:13-15

1. What does this passage teach us about personal responsibility for sin? Does it allow for any other source of sin in us?
2. Sin is most commonly seen as a violation of a moral code. But if this is the case, why did God give the Israelites commandments about issues which we would not see as "moral" issues?

We are responsible beings

Because sin is not a defect in the way we were made, nor does it come from any external source, we are in the fullest sense responsible for our own sin. We cannot pass the blame to anyone or anything else. In Genesis 3, Adam blamed Eve, who blamed the serpent. But God held them each accountable for their own actions. As a result of their sin, sentence of death was passed on Adam and Eve.

That may seem a severe punishment, but only if we see sin as a moral infraction or breaking of a rule. Sin is much more than that - it is the defection of the allegiance of the heart, away from God who is the only true Lord entitled to be given all honour, to serve some other lord - ourselves, an idol (a substitute godlet), or another person.

Since sin involves a change of allegiance and not simply a moral lapse, the re-orientation of the person towards an alternative lord is total, not partial. Alienation from the Lord of Life can only result in death!

Similarly, deliverance from sin means not a mere forgiveness for past or present infractions, but another re-orientation of the person, this time towards the one true God. Becoming a Christian therefore does not involve adding faith in Christ to our previous commitments, but a new commitment which radically alters all our existing commitments. It is not possible for Christ to save us unless we acknowledge his total Lordship over our lives.

Romans 10:8-13

1. Can anyone be saved apart from confessing Christ as Lord?
2. What does it mean to confess Christ as Lord?
3. To what does his Lordship refer?

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

1. The Lordship of Christ means that those who are saved come under his dominion, and become his slaves (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). How is this to function in our lives?

Salvation is for this life

Salvation is not a matter of being delivered from hell after we die, but being made new in this life, so that we turn from the service of idols to the true service of God in everything. God is not engaged in some cosmic sport with the devil to see who can win the greatest number of human beings to beat the other's score before time is up! What would be the point of that?

Rather, God is seeking to bring human beings back to their true calling and purpose: to serve him in this world, caring for the creation he has made, delighting in it, exploring and unfolding it to see what can be made of it, in order to show forth the glory of God in what he has created, and in what we have made of it. Those who are faithful in this task will share the renewed earth with God forever once sin and death have been finally defeated, where we will continue to enjoy the creation and work with it, but freed from the encumbrance and corruption of sin.

The glorious future held in store for the children of God is far greater than we can imagine, but that is the kind of vision the Bible presents to us of what that future will be.

Ephesians 1:18-2:10

1. What does this passage indicate about the future for the children of God?
2. By what means has this future been brought into being?
3. What are the good works God has prepared for us to do?

The redemption of the whole creation

The whole of creation has been corrupted by human sin, and our sin has known no bounds. Nothing is unaffected by that sin, and so the whole of creation must be redeemed.

In the previous study we read Colossians 1:15-20, which speaks about the supremacy of Christ in everything. Read this passage again to remind yourselves of what it says.

Christ has come not simply to save human beings from their sin, but to put right everything which has gone wrong as a result of sin. The whole creation has been disturbed, and the whole creation will be delivered from the effects and bondage brought upon it by human sin.

Romans 8:18-25

1. What is the bondage of creation that results from sin?
2. In what does the freedom of creation consist, and when and how will this freedom become a full reality?

God a creator not a destroyer

God will not destroy this earth, although many think that is the fate awaiting it. God does not destroy anything he has made, but makes a way to redeem it and set it free from the power of sin. This applies as much to the creation as a whole as to human beings. Since it is the fault of human beings that the creation is in bondage to decay, it is hardly just for the perpetrators of that problem to be saved, while the rest of creation, an innocent victim, is simply destroyed.

Nor is it a reasonable response for God to destroy the earth because it has been contaminated by human sin. Even if we consider the enormity of what has happened as a result of our disobedience to God, the effects have touched only a minute fraction of the earth. The earth and its creatures are so vast that we cannot possibly completely ruin it! For God to destroy it because we have been irresponsible, is rather like a father setting fire to the family home because the children have drawn graffiti on all the walls! Would God also not rather redeem the creation he loves than consign it to the flames?

"God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made." Al Wolters, **Creation Regained**

2 Peter 3:5-13

This passage speaks about the destruction of the heavens and the earth by fire at the judgement. However, the former earth (at the time of Noah) was also "destroyed," yet we still live on that same earth. Note the marginal notes for v. 10 in various translations: the text is not that clear at this point, and this should instill caution in coming to conclusions about what it means.

1. What is it that will be destroyed in the judgement: God's good creation, or the sin and contamination which affects that creation and holds it in bondage? What inclines you to choose one way or the other?
2. Can the creation hope for release (Romans 8: 21) if that release is total destruction?
3. In what way will the creation be preserved to become the "new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"?

The new heavens and new earth

The "new heaven and new earth" in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21 are not new in time, but new in quality. The Greek word for "new" here is *kaine*, which indicates fresh, or unworn, while the other word for "new" is *neos*, which indicates new in time, the recent. Some examples of the latter are: Matthew 9:17 (new wine), 1 Corinthians 5:7 (new dough), Hebrews 12:24 (a new covenant), Colossians 3:10 (the new self). These are all new in the sense that they did not previously exist.

Some examples of the former use of *kaine* are 2 Corinthians 5:17 (the new person in Christ - you are not someone else, you are still who you always were, but made new!), Ephesians 2:15 (a new race of the people of God), Acts 17:19 (a new teaching).

While the "dictionary" meaning of a word is not decisive, there is strong indication that the creation will be refreshed, made new again, cleansed of its impurities, not discarded or destroyed. Thus the creation, and our tasks within it, take on new significance in the light of God's intention to refine and purify that which he has brought into being.

Our tasks on this earth are not futile because of their impending destruction, but intended by God for us to do [Ephesians 2:10], to show his glory forever, for if they are truly works of God, whatever they are, in the arts, education, child-rearing, housepainting, whatever - they can all be part of the riches of the new creation if in those tasks God is served and glorified, and our allegiance is to him rather than to an idol which supplants God as the source of meaning and purpose for our lives.

1 Corinthians 3:5-15

1. What does this passage teach us about the character of our work in this world?
2. If we build with gold, silver or precious stones, which will survive the cleansing fire of the Day of judgement, unlike the wood, hay and stubble, what will then become of what we build?

The distinction between the two groups of materials is not in the tasks we do, as if some were superior to others (being a nurse better than an accountant, for instance), but whether they build on the foundation laid by Christ, or whether they reject Christ for some other foundation.

1. How could this distinction be evident in our current daily tasks?

The task of the university student

The task of the university student in learning is to take seriously the responsibility of study and to become thinking, knowledgeable people, able to understand and contribute to the society in which we live, but also able to interpret and critique the vision(s) underlying society that direct and shape it, and to suggest a distinctively Christian alternative vision.

This flows from the view put forward in these studies of the human calling in life. Each of us as a part to play in the human calling of caring for, developing and stewarding the earth, seeking out its treasures, unfolding its potential, repairing the damage from our predations. Some of the component tasks in the human calling require academic skills of a high order, and it is through our university studies that we are introduced to these skills and given instruction in their proper use.

We have an intellectual debt to those whose ideas and research we study. To be the inheritor of an intellectual legacy is as great a responsibility as any other, and frittering this away leads to impoverishment of the mind, neglect of our calling in life, and disobedience to God who has instructed us to learn and think.

But the vision of life and of our relationship to God which underlies that intellectual legacy cannot be accepted without further ado. We must be critically appreciative of it, and not simply adopt it uncritically.

Our primary task as students, then, is the task of learning, so as to be able to work with our intellectual legacy in an insightful, critical and creative spirit which is governed above all by our commitment to Christ and his redemptive work in renewing the entire creation.

The next theme in this study looks at the way in which a Christian worldview makes a difference in our studies.

Luke 15:11-16

1. What does the scenario of this parable teach us about the responsibility for an inheritance?
2. What is our responsibility for our intellectual heritage? If it is not our responsibility to maintain, continue and enhance that heritage through careful study and research, whose responsibility is it?

Part 5

The Christian worldview and education

What difference does it make?

Our worldviews provide a coherent framework for our beliefs about things, and gives cohesion and structure for life in the world that God has made. A worldview is composed of committed and significant basic beliefs: not trivial beliefs, but ones which shape and control the way we think.

Education (simply understood) is a process by which we are introduced to and trained in the use of the knowledge gained by the intellectual endeavours of previous generations. That education passes on to us an understanding of the world, its component parts, the forces at work within it, its past, present configuration and future trends.

Because education is a human endeavour, passing on the results of human culture, it is inevitably also a religious endeavour. That is, it passes on a view of the world which has at its root a set of beliefs about that world and its relationship to God. That worldview will be either in subjection to God, and to his revelation in Scripture, or in rebellion against God, either actively or passively (that is, through indifference to God).

The education we receive, then, is not only the passing on of the codified results of human endeavour, which are themselves rooted in and shaped by a specific worldview, but the process of education itself is shaped by a worldview, and shapes us by that worldview.

The very existence of institutions of university education which do not in any way acknowledge God or his calling to us to be his stewards of the earth, conveys a particular perspective on that education before it even begins!

1. What significance does it have for our study as Christians that the institutions in which that study is done are shaped by a worldview which we do not share?
2. Would universities shaped by a Christian worldview be distinctive and identifiably different?

How can university studies be "Christian"?

On the other hand, a Christian worldview is rooted in faith in God, shaped and directed by the Scriptures, and focused on our human task as God's stewards. Those who are seeking to live in faithfulness to God will struggle to shape their worldview by Scripture, but in the context of university education, we are confronted by alternative worldviews which do not even consider the possibility (for the most part) that there could be a distinctive Christian perspective on the matters studied.

More to the point, many Christians also would not readily acknowledge such a position. We have so abandoned the task of seeking to engage in culture positively and distinctively that Christians have simply adopted the prevailing worldviews of the society around them, and seek to hold these in more or less uneasy association with their Christian faith. We discussed some of the strategies used to do this in **Part 2**.

The resulting worldviews have been sub-Christian at best and actively anti-Christian at worst. Deism is one example of how the power of a non-Christian worldview has influenced the church and robbed it of its Biblical heritage.

Deism is the view that God having once created the world according to particular natural laws, now no longer has any involvement with the world, or even with human beings, but has left them to themselves with the resources of reason and technical skills to provide the solutions to their political, social and scientific problems.

Deism is still a problem in the church, but even more damaging than theoretical Deism is the practical deism of many otherwise evangelical Christians. When it comes to theoretical issues, the possibility of a distinctive contribution of a Christian worldview and of Christian theorising is not even contemplated. To all intents and purposes, Christians have trained themselves to think identically to everyone else: they have accepted the prevailing secular worldview which governs academic life. While some distinctive Christian themes or ideas may be added to this secular worldview, that does not in itself affect its roots or fundamental character, but at best only mitigates some of the more obvious conflicts with Christian faith.

Adding on Christian material in this way achieves nothing, as the (secular) roots will not sustain this (Christian) fruit, nor can the roots give rise to the fruits. While we can artificially produce an external modification of the tree, we can never in this way achieve any change in the nature of the tree. Without repeatedly attaching fruit in this way, the tree will always appear to be what it is: a secular system.

Matthew 7:15-20

1. What does this passage teach us in connection with the analogy above of Christian "fruits" attached to a secular "tree"?
2. Can you name any Nobel award winners who were Christians?

Christian faith reduced to ethics and piety

The Christian church has by and large failed to give careful attention to developing a self-consciously Biblical worldview by which to live. There are aspects of the Biblical perspective which have shaped our life as Christians, but they have generally been combined, to a greater or lesser extent, with elements of pagan and humanist worldviews, while the Christian faith is often reduced to issues of ethical conduct and personal piety. The bulk of the thought-life of Christians is shaped by the prevailing worldviews of our society, so that Christians are often indistinguishable from non-Christians in the way they think and interpret the world around them, apart from a limited range of ethical views.

Christians are called to live out of the distinctive worldview of the Scriptures in the whole of life, and as such cannot adopt the prevailing secular worldview presented in university education. There is no exemption given in Scripture for university students or staff: all who profess Christ are called to think in subjection to the Scriptures.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

1. What does this passage teach us about the need to address our thinking in ways which are distinctively Christian?
2. Does it matter that Christians have not taken seriously the task of academic discipleship, learning to think theoretically in ways which are distinctively Christian?
3. Should Christians be afraid of what they might learn in university education, because of the risk to their faith? How should they respond when their faith is threatened by what they learn?

Distinctively Christian thinking

What then does it mean for Christians to allow their thinking to be shaped by a distinctively Christian worldview?

The Scriptures provide us with a distinctive worldview, that is, a framework of beliefs about things, their relationships, their significance, and so on (refer back to Part One for details of the nature of a worldview).

That worldview, if it has any credibility or validity, will encompass the whole of life. Christianity is robust enough to confront the entire creation, and to orient us into studying the creation. The Christian worldview does not need to give room to alternative (pagan, secular, deist) worldviews as the basis for history, philosophy, sociology, zoology, etc., as if it were incapable of providing an orientation of its own. A worldview seeks to be comprehensive: encompassing the whole of reality, and if Christianity cannot provide such a comprehensive orientation, adequate to support the most advanced academic endeavour, then it is probably not true, or if it is true, it is so trivial as to be irrelevant to the greater proportion of daily life (which is how most people, including a vast number of Christians, actually live).

If we are to assert that Christianity is true, then it is true in everything we do, not simply for a limited area of life. Christianity is not something practiced by consenting adults in private!

Genesis 1:26-28

This is the original command of God to human beings to care for the earth, develop it and explore it.

1. Are there any tasks which we might be engaged in today which are not governed by this passage, in other words, which we can engage in independently of our position as God's imagers to the whole creation?
2. If the Bible was to be understood as providing the essential data for our theoretical research, what disciplines could possibly be catered for in this way? What disciplines would lack any Biblical data?

Walking in the light

It should not be taken to mean that the Bible is to provide the information or data with which our academic activities are to work. We cannot derive the information we need for zoology, geography, linguistics, or cosmology from the text of the Bible. While there may be some information there of interest to various sciences, that is not the purpose of the Bible. If that were the case, then our scientific and theoretical endeavours would have to be limited to the scant information the Bible provides.

Instead, the Bible orients us (provides direction, perspective, purpose) in all that we do, so that as we investigate the world around us, its plant and animal life, the people who live here, the lives they lead, the cultures they have developed, and so on, we will think about these in ways which are distinctively Christian.

The Bible is to act as a light on our path, whatever path that may be, so that wherever we go in God's world, we are always able to see things as God would have us see them. If the Bible was to be understood as providing the essential data for our theoretical research, as posed in the previous group exercise, then only a handful of disciplines would have any relevant data provided. The vast bulk of the disciplines, and the greatest part of even the few that did have some Biblical data, would have no intrinsic connection with God's revelation at all.

Psalm 119:105

1. How does the Word of God act as a lamp to our feet and a light for our path?
2. Does it give any indication as to where our paths might lead?
3. What other passages speak of the Word of God as light for us?

Part 6

Where are we all heading?

What is the purpose of life?

What do we take to be the purpose of life - not just our own individual existence, but of human life as a whole? What are we here for on this earth?

We have considered what the Scriptures teach us about our calling to care for and develop and explore the creation God has made, and how this is to be carried out. We have considered the place that university education has in the human task. But what is the point of it all? Is this actually taking us somewhere, or is life merely, as Henry Ford described history, just one thing after another?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a whole Gospel. It is for people whose lives have gone astray, to put them back on track. Jesus did not come to save "souls," he came to save people. Christ took on all our humanness, and except for sin, he was just as we are, in order for him to be able to save all that we are.

Salvation leads to a new life.

That means, not an addition of something extra to the lives we already have, or a minor readjustment of moral and spiritual sides to our existence, but renewal of the whole of life.

Our faith as Christians is not something separate from any of the areas of our life: art, music, education, politics, leisure. Christ gives us a whole new way of life which incorporates everything there is about us, not just some additional beliefs and experiences which have no real impact on the major part of our existence.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

1. What does this passage teach us about the renewal of our lives in Christ? Does the reconciliation of the "world" exclude anything?

A new future in God's world

When we have been redeemed in Christ, not only is our present life renewed, and our sinful past wiped away, but we are given a whole new future!

That is not merely something for us to look forward to, but a goal for us to work towards.

The future of God is not something which he simply brings into being by himself, but it is something we can share in bringing about. That future can be described as "the Kingdom of God." That is, then God will reign over all things without any opposition, and all will be subject to his wise and just rule.

The kingdom of God has come!

The Kingdom of God is not merely something in the future, a long way off. It has already been inaugurated in Christ, and his rule is being recognised here and now by those who love and obey him. Christ is presently reigning at the right hand of God, working in us and through us to bring an even greater obedience to his rule, so that in the time to come he can hand over to the Father a kingdom in which all acknowledge his name and love him unreservedly. [1 Corinthians 15:20-26]

When Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, he was not talking about something mystical which had no bearing on daily life. The kingdom of God is the breaking in of a new reality which radically transforms everything there is. It is God's righteous and just rule in this earth, here and now!

Matthew 3:1-2, 4:17, 23, 10:5-7, 28:18-20

These verses speak about the proclamation of the kingdom of God, the renewal of human obedience to God and the extension of that rule to all nations.

1. In what way is the Kingdom of God a present reality today?
2. If the Kingdom of God is to be seen as something entirely future, what is Jesus presently doing, and how does this relate to the spiritual warfare for the allegiance of all human beings?

The kingdom of God re-established

The kingdom of God is the re-establishment of God's righteous rule on the earth which he made, an earth which was entrusted to human beings to care for. But instead of caring for this earth and developing it in a way which was pleasing to God, it has been polluted, exploited and abused. And those whom God made to be his stewards, ruling as his regents, have rebelled against him and sought instead to establish their own kingdoms, with themselves at the head and not God, the only rightful king.

But God is now re-establishing his reign in Christ, through the church, those who have renewed their allegiance to God.

The Kingdom of God will come into full manifestation when Jesus returns to accept the allegiance of all those who love him, and to enforce his rule and judgement over those who continue to rebel against him [Psalm 98, Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 19:11-16].

At that time there will not be any other kingdom or authority left in existence which is not subject to Jesus, the rightful king over all the earth and all it contains. All the kingdoms of the earth, every ruler and power, will become the rightful property of King Jesus.

Hebrews 2:5-9

This passage speaks of Jesus as the rightful ruler in the age to come. We do not now see all things subject to him, as will be the case in the future. But Jesus is still ruling over those who do acknowledge him.

1. As all things will be rightfully subject to King Jesus when he returns, and nothing will then be outside his rule or authority, what does this imply about the rule of Jesus right now?
2. Is it possible for anything at the moment to be legitimately outside the rule of Jesus? Is that rule solely for the future? Is he presently King?
3. If all things will be subject to Jesus in the future, what about politics, technology, fashion, art? Will these be part of the kingdom of God, or will they be no longer needed and destroyed? What would that imply for such things here and now?

Obsession, speculation and hope

Many Christians are obsessed with details of biblical prophecy, and approach the Scriptures not with hope in mind, but rampant speculation and fanaticism.

A healthy and Biblical hope for the future, in contrast to such views, will be truly Christ-honouring. Such hope is of real significance for our lives here and now.

The hope for the renewal of all things, and for "the life of the world to come" as the ancient Creeds express it, is a stimulus and motivation for involvement in this world. For if this world is to be destroyed while we escape to some other sphere of existence, then we can treat it with contempt or indifference.

But Christ has already inaugurated his righteous rule in the lives of those who love him, and will renew the whole creation to display the Father's glory for eternity. Apart from Christ, to whom all things are subject, and to whom all things belong as the appointed head of creation, there is no meaning in our lives. But seen in the light of Christ, all our activities are meaningful and significant, not only to us but also to God. Our education, our employment, our family life, our hobbies, our sport and our music and everything else that we are involved in is important. This is because Christ is Lord over everything without exception, and that Lordship is not irrelevant.

All things belong to God, and we are his stewards, whom God will hold to account for what we make of the gifts he has given us for the purpose of caring for and developing his creation. We will not be guiltless before God if we neglect or misuse those gifts for self-service or for destructive purposes.

Matthew 21:33-41

1. What does this parable teach us about our responsibilities as the stewards of God's world?

Matthew 24:45-51

1. What does this parable teach us about the way we should act as the stewards of God's world while waiting for the return of Christ? Compare this passage with Isaiah 5:1-7. How do the actions of the wicked steward compare with Israel (cf. 7b).

God's love for the world

God took great care in creating this earth and was satisfied with his creative work, so that he could declare that the earth was very good. The creation is being redeemed and renewed through the work of Christ and the Spirit, so that God's Kingdom will be the only kingdom. When the final victory is won, the rule of the kingdom of the world is returned to its rightful king (Revelation 11:15). Then we will see that kingdom transformed into what it was meant to be: the obedient response of the creation to its Creator.

The "world" that God hates (see 1 John 2:15-17) is not the earth and its good things which he created, but the spiritual kingdom of darkness which is alienated from God. It is the system of this age, the way of life which rejects God. It is this "world" that leads us to sin.

We are to be active disciples in the world that God created and loved, but also alert and active against the system of the world that is alienated from God - that seeks to be a god and see the world as god(s) instead. Our spiritual warfare is not against flesh and blood (this earthly life) but spiritual wickedness - idolatry, sin, rebellion against God (Ephesians 6:12).

By seeing the world in which we live as the same as the "world system" which is in rebellion against God, which takes for itself the power and authority which belong only to God., we are unable to find a perspective on discipleship and society which encompasses all of life. The world has been identified with areas of human life and activities which christians should avoid. This has left a spiritual vacuum which has been filled with other views on life, other worldviews.

1 John 2:15-17

1. What does this passage teach us about loving the "world"? What is the meaning of "world" in this context?

John 3:16

1. What does this passage teach us about God's love for the "world"? What is the meaning of "world" in this context?
2. What other passages speak of the "world" in Scripture? What are they referring to?

Worldliness is rebellion against God

To be "worldly" is spiritual rebellion which rejects the relevance of God's Word for every area of life, desiring instead to live according to some other perspective. Christians can still be "worldly" while seeking to avoid the world, through excluding any area of life from the Lordship of Christ, which then comes under the dominion of the kingdom of darkness: the principle of rebellion against God. So maintaining that there are aspects of human life and culture which fall outside christian discipleship, and therefore remain in bondage to sin, is in fact a worldly attitude: it isolates aspects of human life from proper submission to Christ the Lord and denies the cosmic scope of the redemption of Christ.

So for instance, artists who reject the Lordship of Christ over the area of art, or Christians who reject art because Christ has no place there according to our conception, have denied in fact Christ's Lordship over all he created and redeemed.

For the Scriptures give us a perspective by which we are to live in every area of life. Therefore separating ourselves from some activities under the illusion that they are intrinsically "worldly" is a denial of the redemption of Christ which encompasses all that he has created; that is: all that exists. We are called to be involved in every area of God's creation, and he calls us to renew these areas through the redemption won by Christ.

James 5:1-6

1. What does this passage have to say about employer-employee relations and God's view of how we conduct such relations? Is our Christian faith involved in this situation in any significant way?

1 John 1:5-10

1. What significance does this passage have for our active involvement as Christians in, for instance, politics or economics?
2. In the light of passages such as these, is it possible to argue that Christianity has no intrinsic connection with our business and work responsibilities?

The effects of sin in the world

A truly Christian worldview will develop a healthy appreciation for the world that God made, and all that is taking place in it. However, it will also recognise the distortions and evil which comes about as a result of the power of the principle of sin which resists the righteous rule of God. Any involvement in political and social issues, for instance, will take careful note of the ever-present influence of sin, but this will not overpower our involvement, since we also believe in the redemption of all things in Christ. There is no sin, no consequences of sin, no temptation to sin, which he is unable to conquer, and his rule in our lives will enable us to conquer sin as well, no matter where it is found, or what form it takes.

A failure to grasp the true nature of sin and redemption will prevent us from understanding how our task has been distorted and hindered by sin, and how it has been set free from the power of sin by Christ to once again be carried out in the obedient service of God.

Instead of a radical excision of the power of sin, and a turning away from disobedience and rebellion in every area of life, individual and corporate, redemption becomes restricted to the personal "spiritual" life of individuals.

A Biblical worldview will develop the nature of redemption not in isolation from our understanding of creation, but rooted in creation, for it is that creation that is redeemed, including the whole of human life.

Genesis 3:14-19, Revelation 21:1-5, 22:1-4

1. How do the passages in Revelation balance the passage in Genesis?
2. Is there anything subjected to the curse which is not released from that curse? (Cf.Revelation 20:10)
3. In what way can we see fulfilled in Revelation 21-22 what was intended in Genesis 1-2?

The future of God's creation

Because this earth is important to God he will renew it in the age to come. Christ will return to establish his kingdom on this earth, and will receive as his rightful due all that we are doing here and now. The work we are engaged in, if pursued in the power of the Spirit of Christ and in faithfulness to his direction, will become part of the eternal kingdom. So do not despise your work here and now, for if you do you may find that you enter the kingdom empty handed with nothing to render to Christ as his due from the gifts he has entrusted you with.

There is a dynamic character to the creation, because creation is on the move under the guiding hand of God who leads it to its unfolding and completion.

The Father reconciles his created but fallen world through the death of his Son, and recreates it by his Spirit into a Kingdom of God. Herman Bavinck

Thus we can see how each member of the Trinity is involved in our discipleship in all of life: the whole context and calling of our lives in this world was given by the Father; we have been redeemed by Christ and are subject to his Lordship, which extends over all things; and the Holy Spirit renews, empowers, directs and drives on the creation, including every aspect of our activity within it, to its goal of the glory of God.

There is not one single inch of creation concerning which Christ the Lord does not say, *That belongs to me*. Abraham Kuyper

The glory of God is the ultimate end of every creature and the work of the Holy Spirit is to lead and transform the creation to show that glory. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit is for the sake of creation, to lead it to completion and recreate it into a kingdom of God. The Spirit constantly renews and restores the creation and draws it back to the path it should follow in order for it to reach its fulfillment as the fulness of the Kingdom of God.

Now that you have completed the studies,

...where to go from here? If you wish to investigate ideas such as those presented here in a deeper way, there are a number of books listed below which would be of help. There are also other study materials available that look at particular issues and areas of life, such as the arts and politics, using the approach outlined here.

There is a wealth of resource material exploring how to bring the Word of God to bear on the whole of life, looking at different issues, specific academic disciplines, and so on.

An initial list of suggestions for further reading....

Henri Blocher. **Evil and the cross. Christian thought and the problem of evil.** Leicester: Apollos (IVP), 1994.

Henri Blocher. **In the Beginning: the opening chapters of Genesis.** Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1984.

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There is also a wealth of resources on the internet. Some starting points:

[All of Life Redeemed](#) – a collection of papers by Christian scholars in a multitude of different disciplines.

[Reformational Scholarship](#) – a blog by Christian scholars on current topics.

[Reformational Publishing Project](#) – scans of older books in the reformational tradition.