

Deny Your Self-Rule

*In those days Israel had no king;
everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

Judges 17:6

I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

Invictus by William Henley

Within the context of self-denial we again see why the whole story of God is critical in understanding what it means to be a disciple, called to make other disciples. In the creation account we see there was a Supreme Ruler who spoke everything into existence. This of course, included man, who was made in the image of God and as His image-bearer man was to live for God by living under His rule. God had authority and dominion over man and man was never to seek self-rule. God spoke this truth to them in giving them the Cultural Mandate... also known as the Creation Mandate rooted in the following verse.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." **Genesis 1:28**

Here is that *something bigger* to live for that they were made for. God was over Adam and Eve who were over everything else as God's representatives in His creation. This moment of what we call transcendence, living above and beyond ourselves, was designed to deliver man from the meager and miniscule existence of living for the self.

When God created Adam and Eve He intentionally hard wired them to receive His

revelation that would give them everything they needed to live under the reign and rule of God. His word was designed to inform their minds, inspire their hearts, and instruct their wills to live for nothing less than the transcendent glory of God. Francis Schaeffer called this "true truth" because we live in a world where people call truth whatever truth is for them.

They were to build their lives on the "dust-to-glory" cosmic story their Creator was writing and to "Think God's thoughts after Him" as the German astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler once said. Never were they to write their own script or draw their own conclusions outside and apart from the revelation of God. To do this would be to deny their very humanity.

"The essence of life is not man's separate being, but God contained in man."

Leo Tolstoy (Diary 1898)

Their understanding of everything in the created order was to come only from the One who created it. Who better to know the meaning of what was created than the One who created it! God gave them both the authority and power to rule and have dominion over everything in creation, but not over the One who created everything. This of course, was the whole point of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil in the Garden. The tree was simply a test for Adam and Eve to see if they would be satisfied under the reign and rule of their Creator or if they would seek to rule themselves. God was never to be removed from the throne of their lives because only with God on the throne would they be living for His glory—the purpose of their existence.

Self-rule leading to self-righteousness (we will look at this next week) and every other self-destructive mind set, emotion, and behavior in this world was never in the mind of God. However, it was in the mind of someone else back in the Garden who exerted his own self-rule. As an angle in heaven, he was sent packing into a Paradise that would soon be lost (**Isaiah 14:12-14, Ezekiel 28:12-18, Luke 10:18**). In week one, we read through the conversation between the serpent and Eve. Let's now sharpen our focus on the promise made by the serpent, this new “revelation”, enticing Adam and Eve to remove God from the throne of their lives and seek self-rule.

(The serpent said to the woman), “You will be like God!” **Genesis 3:5**

When you think about it, the serpent truly was “more crafty than all of the other animals the Lord created” (**Genesis 3:1**) because he knew exactly what to entice Adam and Eve with. He knew they were made by God, for God, in the image of God, and by telling them they could actually be God, he was simply offering them more of the transcendence they were created for. His invitation to our first parents was for more life, but it only brought death. It has been his invitation to everyone who has ever lived since that day including our Lord Jesus in His wilderness experience prior to the launch of His ministry on Earth (**Matthew 4**).

The serpent sets the “you will be like God” promise before all of us. The question is, will we listen to the father of lies (**John 8:44**), and go

after everything he offers us, missing the One thing we truly need to live a life that truly matters. The only way to begin the lifelong process of dismantling self-rule, keeping God in His rightful place as Ruler over and in our lives, is to live our lives in the light of a biblical world view. To be sure, only a biblical world view will provide the answers to the deep life questions everyone asks.

In my years in the personal development field, first as a student, and then a teacher, I was exposed to what I call “quest questions.” They are questions which every person who has ever lived has wrestled with throughout life. See if you have ever asked yourself any or all of the following questions:

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- Why am I here?
- Where did I come from?
- Where am I going?
- What went wrong?
- What is the remedy?

What I was also exposed to in the field of personal development were the answers to these questions from all the so-called experts. To say these answers left me still wanting and wandering, is an understatement of gargantuan proportions. In September of 1995, after a few years of spiritual sowing by some Christian friends, we were asked a question absent from that list. It was the same question we examined in Week Three that Jesus directed at Peter, “Who do you say I am?” Funny thing about the answer to that question, it is the only way to find the true answers to every other “quest question” the world has been asking since the Fall in the Garden.

The man who helped shape my heart for the Gospel ministry by removing me from the throne of my life was Dr. D. James Kennedy, who was

my pastor and friend for 6 years. Here is how he addressed the quest questions:

“There are only two sets of answers to these questions, only two directions to take in the quest for life. One set of answers is true, and all others are false; one direction takes you somewhere worth going to; the rest go nowhere. Most people in this world are going diametrically in the wrong direction, the opposite direction from the way in which their true quest lies. This is very sad because they obviously will not find that which they seek. What is worse, the nowhere they are going toward goes lead somewhere. It leads unerringly toward death.” 1

The apostle Paul confirms this truth, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (**Colossians 2:8**). The apostle Paul is telling us the world has no true answers to the questions that matter most in life. Their answers are false, futile, and frustrating at every crossroad in this life.

Viewing Our World

How do you see the world? What lenses do you look through? Because we are all made in the image of God we all seek—both believer and unbeliever alike—a way to make sense of this world. We ask “quest questions” because God has wired us to ask them. Image-bearers of God simply don’t like loose ends or riddles without answers. Just like there are only two sets of answers to life’s most important questions, true and false, there are only two sets of lenses to look through to determine what you see (yet the false ones come in countless forms). These lenses are described as worldviews, or how we view or interpret what is going on around us... our reality. From the German word *Weltanschauung* (*Welt* = world; *schauen* = to look), worldview is

simply the way we look at the world. Albert Wolters in *Creation Regained* writes this.

“What role does a worldview play in our lives? The answer to this is that our worldview functions as a guide to our life. It functions like a compass or a road map. It orients us in the world at large, gives us a sense of what is up and what is down, what is right and what is wrong in the confusion of events and phenomena that confronts us. Our worldview shapes, to a significant degree, the way we assess the events, issues, and structures of our civilization and our times. It allows us to “place” or “situate” the various phenomena that come into our purview. One of the unique characteristics of human beings is that we cannot do without the kind of orientation and guidance that a worldview gives. We need guidance because we are inescapably creatures with responsibility who by nature are incapable of holding purely arbitrary opinions or making entirely unprincipled decisions. We need some creed to live by, some map by which to chart our course. The need for a guiding perspective is basic to human life, perhaps more basic than food or sex.” 2

To be sure, there are many ingredients that go in to making up our worldview, from family and friends, to environment and education, to our beliefs and value systems. Ultimately, what we have is either a secular (humanist) worldview or a biblical worldview, naturalism or supernaturalism. One “leads unerringly toward death” while the other leads unerringly toward life.

I often have opportunities to speak with Christians regarding a biblical worldview. Many believe their view of the world is indeed biblical simply because they have been saved. Generally, this is not the case. Consider these words from James Sire in his book *The Universe Next Door*.

“It is important to note that our own worldview may not be what we think it is. It is rather what we show it to be by our words and actions. Our worldview generally lies so deeply embedded in our subconscious that unless we have reflected long and hard, we are unaware of what it is. Even when we think we know what it is and lay it out clearly in neat propositions and clear stories, we may well be wrong. Our very actions may belie our self-knowledge.”³

Hollow and Deceptive Philosophy

The secular worldview is both hollow and deceptive because of the view of final reality to which it leads people. Francis Schaeffer, whose writings helped me immensely crystallize my understanding of the difference between these two worldviews writes the following.

“The final reality on the humanist side, which is being taught in our schools and which is much of the framework of the thinking and writing of our day—the final reality is thought of as material or energy which has existed in some form forever and which has its present configuration by pure chance.”⁴

In other words, the world we live in today evolved into existence by nothing more than a random roll of the dice somewhere in the eternally-existing materialistic outer space. Time, space, and matter are alone eternally self-existing. It was Carl Sagan who touted this myth through the public television show *Cosmos* back in 1980 with these words, “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” At that time it was the most widely watched show in the history of public television and countless millions of unsuspecting viewers were unwittingly indoctrinated with the secular worldview of final reality. Human tradition and the basic principles of this world would have us believe we crawled out of a bubbling cesspool of amino acids 10 billion years ago instead of being

created by God, for God, in the image of God. As someone once said, “The secular worldview would have us believe we have gone from GOO to YOU by way of the ZOO!”

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I like to put it in terms the kids can easily understand, remember, and articulate. In looking at the opening of the Bible we read these first four words, “In the beginning God...” which settles the matter. However, in the secular worldview profoundly advanced through living rooms across America, these words have been changed to read, “In the beginning I...! Man is at the center of the secular worldview. Man puts himself in the place of God and sits on the throne of life. Man decides what is right and wrong, good and evil, and the secular humanist believes man is inherently good, evil is a result of a faulty society, and through education, not divine intervention, man must and will save himself. Hollow and deceptive to say the least, leading to utter hopelessness and despair.

Holy And Divine Truth

We can either be held captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy that depends on the fallible wisdom of this world or by holy and divine truth. We can be ruled by the sinful self, what St. Augustine called **homo curvatus in se** (*man curved inward on oneself*), or ruled by the One who created all things. We are either held captive to this world or His Word as it relates to our worldview. These worldviews are diametrically opposed because of what is called “final realty.” The biblical worldview has a personal, loving, good, just and merciful God as the final reality. Conversely, the secular worldview has an impersonal force of material

energy that has existed forever in some form as their final reality.

Again Francis Schaeffer provides great insight, “In the Judeo-Christian world view, the final reality is the infinite-personal God who truly is there objectively whether we think He is there or not. He is not there just because we think He is there. He is there objectively. And He is the Creator. He is the Creator of everything else. And we must never forget that one of the distinguishing marks of the Judeo-Christian God is that not everything is the same to Him. He has a character, and some things agree to His character and some things conflict with that character. To this God (in contrast to Buddhism and Hinduism for example) not everything is the same, and, therefore, there are absolutes, right and wrong, in the world.” 5

It should be plain to see that the lenses we view life through will determine, to an altogether unsuspecting extent, our position on every “quest question” we face, including the most important question in both life and death. What we must always be mindful of is that our position (what we believe) will eventually work itself out

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into our practice (how we behave) in the areas that matter most in life. Let’s hear once again from Dr. Schaeffer.

“Our view of final reality—whether it is material-energy, shaped by impersonal chance, or the living God and Creator—will determine our position on every crucial issue we face today. It will determine our views on the value and dignity of people, the base for the kind of life the individual and society lives, the direction law will take, and whether

there will be freedom or some form of authoritarian dominance.” 6

The only way Peter could answer the most important question in life in the way he did was because he was, by God’s grace, looking through the lenses of a biblical worldview and he saw the One asking the question as the “final reality” in both this life and the life to come.

Of all the apostles, Peter seems to be the most impetuous. Inasmuch as everyone needs a map to chart the course of their lives, Peter needed one up close, personal, and in 3-D. He got it while walking this earth with the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter was interpreting his life experience in the light of divine revelation, not in the light of fallible worldly wisdom. He was living out the truth of **2 Corinthians 5:10**, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

A disciple of Christ needs to be clear on this inescapable truth: something will serve and something will master. Either Jesus will sit on the throne of our lives or we will. Either Jesus will rule us or we will rule ourselves. Only when we are looking through the lens of a biblical world view can we deny our tendency for self-rule in every area of life and surrender to the rule of the only Ruler and Wise King who has the right to rule us.

We must not lean to our own understanding, being wise in our own eyes, and prudent in our own sight; but we must submit our short-sighted reason to the light of divine revelation. There are mysteries in religion, which are above, though not contrary to our natural reason: and therefore we shall never become Christians unless we call down imaginations, “and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the

obedience of Christ.” It is in this respect, as well as others, that we must become fools for Christ’s sake, and acknowledge we know nothing without revelation as we ought to know. We must, with all humility and reverence, embrace the truths revealed to us in the holy scriptures, for thus only can we become truly wise, even “wise unto salvation.”

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CONCLUSION

Let’s close this week where we opened, with only the last two lines of a poem that best describes the heart that beats after self-rule. After having one of his legs amputated due to complications arising from tuberculosis, and being told by doctor’s the other would soon follow, English poet William Henley enlisted the services of a distinguished surgeon who, after multiple surgical interventions, was able to save his remaining leg. While recovering William was inspired to write the verses that became a short Victorian poem *Invictus* (Latin for “unconquered”).

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Countless millions have built their lives on this “hollow and deceptive” philosophy. To believe for a single moment that we are the “master of our fate” and “the captain of our soul” is to believe a fairy tale that leads to disillusionment, despair, and utter destruction.

REFERENCE NOTES:

1. D. James Kennedy, *What is God Like?* Revell, 1995, 19.
2. Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*, Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview, 5.
3. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, InterVarsity Press, Fifth Edition, 2009, 20-21.
4. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, Francis Schaeffer.
5. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, Francis Schaeffer.
6. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, Francis Schaeffer, 51.
7. George Whitefield, *The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial*, a sermon rooted in Luke 9:23.

Driving the Roots Deeper – Questions for Discussion

1. On a scale of 1 – 10 (*1 = low visibility / 10 = high visibility*) how would you describe your effectiveness in denying self-rule?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. German astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler said we are to “Think God’s thoughts after Him.” What does that statement mean? How well are you doing in this area?

3. Why is the serpent’s “you will be like God” promise so attractive to us?

4. How would you define the term “worldview” and what role does it play in our lives?

5. What is the difference between a secular worldview and a biblical world-view?

6. Why is the biblical worldview the only view that answers life’s most important questions?

7. Where do you try to be the “master of your own fate”?

8. What is your most important take-away from this lesson?
