

Biblical Worldview Scope for *World History, 6th ed.*

This document is an attempt to answer (in the form of a scope) the question, “What must a student comprehend and value in order to understand world history from a biblical worldview?” What follows is a list of the themes that we believe are essential for students of history to understand and internalize. We anticipate that early in the course students will be required to *recall* and *explain* these themes. However, as these themes recur, students will also *evaluate* ideas, *formulate* a Christian understanding, and *apply* what they have learned to real-life situations. High levels of internalization result when students *apply* their learning.

Justice

Creation

Preserving fairness and order in human interactions naturally requires a system of rules.

God’s creation reflects His orderly character. He has given rules for how all things work together, including people. God expects people to conform to those guidelines because they are beings made in His image. When people treat one another in alignment with their Creator’s orderly design, justice is the result.

God has tasked governments with the primary obligation of upholding justice (1 Kings 10:9; Ps. 72:1-7). Governments ought to encourage people to do right and to respect each other’s rights. Even if there were no sin, governments would still bear this responsibility in an unfallen world, mediating differing ideas about how to best steward God’s world.

Fall

Adam and Eve broke God’s command when human history had only just begun. Rebellion against God and oppression of others has led to injustice ever since.

Many individuals and civilizations have based their sense of justice on their own ideas rather than God’s revelation, leading to injustice. Historical conflicts were often rooted in differing standards of justice. Utilitarianism and egalitarianism, for example, are systems that usurp God’s direction by overemphasizing one good while severely undermining many others. The result is great evil and further injustice. When civilizations reject true justice, tyranny or anarchy ultimately follow. Many leaders have chosen to ignore the idea of justice altogether and pursue personal gratification. They have ignored the rights of others and have perpetrated wrong against them, and in so doing have rejected the power or existence of God.

Redemption

Believing students respond to injustice by pursuing good government as they await the perfect justice of God’s future kingdom.

Though we await many things in redemption, some progress can be made even now. Governments should try to attain true justice, and followers of Christ should encourage that pursuit. Christians should defend government’s God-given role to protect without partiality. This includes punishing those who violate others’ rights. In a just society, disputes and conflicts are resolved in a fair and equitable manner, in line with the creational norms God has established.

Believers should also consider biblically appropriate ways for citizens to press for change when injustice occurs, supporting gradual change rather than revolution. One of the ways to accomplish this in a democratic society is to elect leaders of proven character. As students encounter instances of injustice in history, they should be able to

propose biblical alternatives and identify historical Christian responses. Students should also apply the lessons they learn to contemporary injustices, proposing and even participating in biblically appropriate responses to them. Ultimately, even when wronged, Christians can endure injustice on earth because they are assured of a future judgment.

Power

Creation

God gave people the ability to exercise control over creation by asserting authority and by interpreting the significance of events and artifacts.

Power belongs ultimately to God. Yet God has given humanity dominion over creation as well as the power needed to exercise that dominion. Power is essential to any civilization for self-preservation. To uphold order, God gives positions of authority and additional power to some, such as parents over children and governmental leaders over citizens. Leaders are tasked and equipped by God to wisely guide communities. Leaders prove their character by managing well the power with which they have been entrusted.

Fall

The Fall's results include abuses and distortions of power.

God gave people the mandate, ability, and drive to exercise dominion over the earth, but in a fallen world, this impulse is often twisted, with devastating results. Power is often abused to the rallying cry of "might makes right." Those who wield power tend to pursue their own will against what is just. Culture, society, and institutions suffer when power is used to generate rather than resolve conflict. Powerful people enriching themselves at the expense of the vulnerable stand in stark contrast to the character and example of God, who cares for the weak and needy.

Redemption

Efforts to properly restore authority should pursue peace, order, and an increase in the fear of God (Prov. 9:10).

The proper use of power requires wisdom. As those in power recognize that they themselves are under a higher Power, they will fear His vengeance and refuse to abuse their power. Further, love for others will protect against abuse. Because Christ's greatest commands are to love God and to love others (Matt. 22:37–40), Christians should be exemplary in their proper use of power and should speak out against its abuse.

Community

Creation

Political order rises naturally out of the basic units of families and communities.

God has created all people in His image with both the capacity and need for relationships. It was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), and people cannot without cooperation fully obey God's command to fill the earth and have dominion over it. God's intention for each person is to reflect to others His love, as the second great commandment indicates (Mark 12:31), and this is impossible apart from community.

A biblical approach to community wisely balances rights and responsibilities. Each person exists within larger human communities such as neighborhoods, cities, and countries. Some communities are specifically established by God (e.g., family, church, state). Other communities are established by people based on something they hold in common (civic organizations, towns, online communities). People become part of certain communities voluntarily. However, by God's design and providence, they exist in some communities which they did not choose, such as their family—though their lack of choice does not negate their community responsibilities (cf. Matt 15:5-6; 1 Tim 5:4, 8).

Fall

Throughout history, people have sought to identify the moral principles necessary to shape healthy communities, but when the wisdom of Scripture is ignored, disappointment commonly results.

Societies tend to overemphasize either the individual or the community. Individualism promotes the individual's interests and independence as overriding the interests and unity of the community. Fallen individuals reject God's authority and God-ordained authorities. They tend to insist on their rights as individuals while not appreciating and fulfilling their responsibilities. This often involves minimizing or rejecting their role in communities they did not choose to be part of, such as family.

Societies may also assign too much importance to the community to the detriment of the individual. Governments sometimes absorb power and authority beyond God's intention, and many people in history have been subject to tyrannical leaders and totalitarian regimes. In such situations, the community assumes too much authority over the rights and responsibilities of individuals, individual rights are not adequately recognized, and God is dishonored in the unjust treatment of his image-bearers. Apart from formal governmental coercion, various communities may also exert undue pressure on individuals to conform to an unrighteous community standard.

Redemption

Christian students have the obligation to live faithfully among their neighbors and present the hope of the gospel to them.

When people individually respond to Christ in faith, they become part of a community—God's church. Their membership in this community has implications for all the other communities of which they are a part. A Christian's relationship with a church community includes rights but focuses on responsibilities. Each believer is called to serve and to sacrifice for the good of others, which means learning how to prioritize others both inside and outside the church (Rom 12:10; Gal 6:10). God's people must champion the rights of others while faithfully fulfilling their responsibilities. They must learn to navigate a dual citizenship in the world and in God's kingdom (Phil. 3:20). As they exist within a political community, they should fulfill their responsibilities to pray for their government leaders, influence governments to align more closely with God's design, submit to government authority so far as Christian faithfulness allows, and witness to the truth when obeying the government would mean disobeying Christ. Christians recognize that both individuals and communities are important, but each must be put under Christ or one will dominate the other (Luke 14:26).

Environment

Creation

Humans shape, and are shaped by, their surroundings.

God has entrusted diverse environments to human stewardship, and has given people authority to use natural resources for their benefit (Gen. 1:28–29). He expects people to exercise dominion by adapting to their environments as well as adapting their environments to themselves. This exercising of dominion includes innovation and invention.

Fall

Eve was tempted by the presence of the forbidden tree in Eden, and when she ate its fruit the entire course of human existence was irrevocably altered.

God cursed the ground and restricted its fruitfulness. God's common grace mitigates the curse upon the physical environment. This common grace allows people to overcome environmental challenges and is given by God to sustain even those who do not acknowledge Him as God (Acts 14:16–17; Ps 145:9, 15–16). Yet hard work remains necessary to access limited resources. This difficulty and human selfishness have driven many civilizations to attempt to seize what belongs to others through war and coercion, investing their energy into developing weapons for conquest instead of innovating for more efficient use of resources. Additionally, many ignore their responsibility as stewards and access resources in ways that, while convenient, are needlessly harmful for both the physical

environment and for people. Both human righteousness and human wickedness can have significant implications for a civilization's physical environment (Prov 29:4). Some have gone to the extreme of seeking environmental protection to the detriment of humans. Some worship nature as a god.

Redemption

As students encounter historical examples of people shaping their environment and being shaped by it, they will be challenged to approach their own environment with a biblical worldview.

Believers recognize that although every civilization is affected by its environment, the environment itself doesn't ultimately determine human history. Though the physical environment of every civilization has been marred by the Fall, God still expects people to cultivate contentment (1 Tim 6:6-10) and to exercise wise stewardship. They fulfill the Creation Mandate as they find ways to access needed resources while minimizing detriment to their environment. Balancing human benefit and stewardship of our environment is an important skill to develop. When a civilization's environment does not supply what is needed or desired, it should pursue trade and innovation to manage well what God has entrusted to it rather than unjustly taking resources that belong to others.

Religion

Creation

We were created to worship God (Ps. 8:4, 9).

We were created with the capacity to know and respond to God as the ultimate object of devotion. General revelation bears witness to God's reality (Rom 1:19–20), and the Scriptures portray God as Creator and humanity as His creation (Gen 1–2). Worship of God is at the heart of true religion.

Because religion concerns ultimate realities and the human relationship with God, it has a profound effect upon other aspects of human existence. Every culture is shaped by its religion, and religion is in turn gradually reshaped by culture as it develops. Governments, as dependent on culture, are also thus heavily influenced by religion.

Fall

People throughout history have substituted other religions for worship of the true God revealed in Scripture, a choice for which they are culpable (Rom. 1:18, 28).

Fallen people know the truth about God, yet they refuse to worship Him. But that choice does not erase their need to worship. They satisfy this need by designing their own objects of worship (Romans 1:18–32), such that other religions find their genesis as degradations of the worship of the living God. Our worship transforms us, and this has corresponding effects on culture. In addition to rejecting the truth about God seen in creation, fallen people also dismiss the truth God has revealed in the Bible. The result is religion that serves people rather than the Creator, whether by promoting the worship of rival gods or claiming to worship no god at all. Throughout history, many civilizations have created new religions to legitimize their actions and values. In doing so, they used religion as a tool to benefit themselves rather than as a way to honor God.

Redemption

As believers learn about the religions of the world, they will be challenged to consider their own role in advancing the message of Christ (Rom. 1:16–17).

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God is willing to forgive His enemies, even those who have chosen to worship false gods. He calls them to stop worshiping the gods of their making and to turn in repentance and faith to the one true God (Acts 17:16, 29-31). God has called Christians to spread this message, actively working to restore religion to its proper function by teaching and example. This requires pursuing a balance that gives religion a role in civic life without using it as merely a tool of governments. Followers of Christ must actively challenge false religions and false ideas about God and His world.

Aesthetics

Creation

God made a beautiful world and intends for people to beautify it further (Gen. 2:9; Ps. 8:5, 9).

Humans are made in the image of their Creator, able to appreciate beauty and craft beautiful works. The best art captures the beauty of God's creation and helps us see with clearer eyes the beauty God created. The best music captures the beauty that God built into a world that vibrates and brings it forth to the delight of listeners. The best stories capture something of the great story that the divine author is writing and helps us see that story clearly.¹

Given that God made a world with beauty, it follows that God built norms for beauty into the creation. The ultimate standard of beauty is God Himself. This is implied in the idea that God is glorious. God displayed his own glory in the creation, and the best of human aspirations are those oriented toward loving God and loving others.

Fall

People use their creative abilities to depict condemned things as beautiful and praiseworthy things as inadequate or undesirable.

Beauty is not simply in the eye of the beholder. The claim that beauty is something entirely subjective does not accord with reality. Reasons can be given for why something is beautiful or not. While our evaluations of the aesthetic elements of culture must not be made with our own culture as the standard, we cannot adopt a cultural or aesthetic relativism.

The aesthetic element in many cultures is used to undermine or oppose that which is true and good. However, Philippians 4:8 requires that truth, goodness, and beauty be held together. Though cultures may develop artifacts that are in themselves beautiful—a temple, mosque, or idol, for instance—the use of beauty to promote that which is false or bad is a fallen use of beauty.

Redemption

As believers look toward the perfect standard of God's glory, they should develop skill in discerning truth, goodness, and beauty (Phil. 4:8).

Christians ought to develop both discernment and taste. Christians need discernment to distinguish between what is true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly. Students need to develop proper taste in order to appreciate beauty that they at first may not appreciate. This is especially true when studying other cultures. What may at first appear repulsive, may truly be repulsive. But it may simply be that one's taste has not been properly calibrated to see something that is truly beautiful as beautiful.

Christians ought to participate in creating works of aesthetic beauty. Christians should not merely be cultural critics. Genesis 1:27–28 indicates that they should be culture makers as well. One way Christians press toward redemption in the present is by making godly cultural artifacts.

1 J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 71.