

Read also Deuteronomy 18:9-15, Ezekiel 11:19-21

Satan, our enemy, thinks like the world. So Satan battles against God with a contemporary or secular worldview. Satan came against the early church, instilling the rage that resulted in Stephen's death. *Just let one of them be killed and they will all go running. Simple. Final.* The devil thought that would be the end of it; the church would be extinguished. However, God has a different worldview, which becomes our worldview when we become believers.

The devil's tact for snuffing out the gospel actually succeeded in spreading it.

God is amazing!

- God can take what seems to be utter defeat and turn it completely around.
- God uses all circumstances, good or bad, to fulfill God's purposes.
- God sends His word out, and it always produces fruit. God says, 'my word will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it' (Isa 55:11).
- No matter what tragedy hits, the Psalmist writes: "God is our hiding place; God protects us from trouble and surrounds us with victory" (32:7).

That's exactly what happened to the believers after Stephen's murder. They scattered to escape persecution. But, they didn't run from the gospel. No way. They went down the road. But they did not go in fear. They carried on with their Christ-given mission.

Philip, one of the deacons, went to Samaria, proclaiming the good news.

Isn't that amazing? Living for Christ was first on their agenda.

The believers shared a worldview that said God is in charge; God was present to help them; God had given the Holy spirit to heal and solve what's wrong. That's a Christian worldview.

When you talk about different worldviews, and there are several, you frame the discussion with four questions:

1. What's the world like? (What's reality?)
2. What are people like?
3. What's wrong with the world?
4. What's the remedy?

We will talk about two basic worldviews today. Christians answer those four questions like this:

1. The world is two-tiered. There's the Creator who's in charge and is different from the created. (God is God . . . and you are not!)
2. People are the pinnacle of God's creation.
3. But people have turned from God's will, not liking God's authority.
4. The solution to repair that breach only occurs through the grace and gift of Jesus Christ, which God has extended to us.

That's the good news the believers were preaching. Let's hear the story. READ Acts 8:9-25

Before, Samaria had been hated territory; now the believers freely shared about Jesus there.

Before, Jews hated Samaritans:

- When people cursed Jesus, they called Him a Samaritan (Jn 8:48)
- The disciples couldn't believe Jesus would speak to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4)
- When Jesus healed the ten lepers and only one came back, that one was a Samaritan (Lk 17:16)

So Jesus overcomes all that national recrimination, and perhaps as the believers entered into Samaria, they remembered Jesus' openness, talking to Samaritans.

You see, God wants all nations to be blessed through the gospel. God wants people from all nationalities to be joined in Jesus' name.

When they heard the good news and experienced Jesus' healing through the Holy Spirit, the Samaritans believed with great joy!

But sometimes when you become a Christian it takes awhile to get the picture; to understand the values of God; to know what God expects.

So Simon, the magician, the man who believed he was "the great one," came to Christ. And he brought lots of baggage with him. He was popular. He was in the limelight. He did magic. He had money.

His worldview might be like this:

- He believed he was on par with God, calling himself "The Great One." So there was no delineation between God and humans, where God is in charge and people are not.
- He believed he could manipulate the supernatural; that people had power over God, not the other way around.
- He believed money could buy anything, even the Spirit of God.

Do you see the difference in worldviews?

They are quite the opposite. God's way says God is in charge; God has the power; God gives to us and we in turn give to others in gratitude, living to give, not get; living by trust in God, with confidence in God's willingness to take care of us.

Before the gospel reached Samaria, those people had a different worldview. They looked to Simon the sorcerer to do magic to solve their problems. They most likely paid him for it. Lest you think that sort of belief is from a bygone era, that no one would do that today, just do a search on the internet. Here are some ads I found:

- Readings by Sonja – Mt. Pleasant
- Tarot Card Readings by J – Dallas
- Love Psychic – reunites lovers nationwide, guaranteed
- Psychic Readings by Lauren – Arlington
- Wiccan Spells – Dallas

These are pagan religions. They are just like religions in the ancient world. Paganism is currently the fastest growing religion in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

All people have something within them that causes them to reach out beyond themselves for help. I believe that is the image of God which God instilled in each of us and because of that, we long for God. When we accept Christ, God instructs us very clearly to trust God only; not magic, not astrology, not power from within ourselves, because only God can fill that void inside.

So God tells us, avoid like the plague all sorcery, psychics, witchcraft, and the like.

Simon the Superstitious had not come to grips with that. God was his source now; he was to receive and then give to others; not procure on his own power and grasp for his own gain. It was a gift from God.

Instead,

- He loved money
- He was impressed by power
- He valued prestige and ambition
- He loved himself

Peter gave him a crash course in God's reality. "Repent! Those things are wicked! Make your heart right. Your life depends on it!"

He said in essence, we will be judged for rejecting our Creator. We will be rejected for putting ourselves in the place of God.

It's important to know that when we belong to Jesus Christ, things in life must change. We cannot hang onto what the world thinks is important: personal power, prestige, and money. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and money." Instead, we lay down worldly desires, we give instead of grasp, and we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit from God through Christ.

It's all built on gift. It's all about giving. Are you into getting? Or giving? God's way, the Christian's worldview is giving. If you learn to give, the most amazing thing happens. God, in God's own timing and way, will reward you.

Jesus is God's gift of grace to restore us to God. The Holy Spirit is God's gift. The work of the Spirit is surprising, undeserved, unable to be manipulated or controlled (8:20). It's about God's grace. We respond to that grace. We give, and God provides surprisingly; miraculously.

*"The nations you are about to displace consult sorcerers and fortune-tellers, but the LORD your God forbids you to do such things."*

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<sup>1</sup>Kevin Ford workshop, Congregation Transformation Conference, General Assembly Mission Council, Ft. Worth, TX, October 18-21, 2010.

No, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you. It is good and pleasing and perfect."

AMEN