

Love, Life, and Worldview

By Chuck Colson

(Written from remarks given during Joni and Friends President's Retreat 2009)

As a driven, Type-A personality, there is only one person who can slow me down—my grandson, Max, who has autism. When Max is in town, he becomes my agenda. We love Max dearly, and he's taught us lessons about love that we couldn't have learned any other way. I've come to see that those with so called disabilities among us are really gifts of God. Take Joni Eareckson Tada, for example. I can't imagine living the way Joni does and always smiling. It's an amazing thing to see God work so powerfully through her life. Joni and Friends is one of the most important ministries in the country—or in the world perhaps—because she is one of the most effective advocates for life created in the image of God and for every life being precious. Joni's an advocate in two ways—she's extremely articulate, and she also lives it.

The German scholars in the eugenics movement of the 1920s referred to “life not worth living.” It was considered an enlightened view that we would weed out the unfit and create a perfect race. It was in the salons of the cultural elite in England, the United States and Europe where eugenics became the fashionable ideology of the day. However, the horrors of eugenics were made manifest during the regime of Adolf Hitler. We've assumed that this all ended after World War II, after the Holocaust, but it's been resurrected with a vengeance, and we're seeing it today in various forms.

Can you imagine looking at Joni's life and all that she's accomplished, and saying it's a life not worth living? It makes me angry when people start talking about the disabled and their lives being meaningless, and how they'll never be able to accomplish anything. I've seen firsthand that it's not true because Max has already taught our family so much about love. I have come to realize that God sent Max to me so I could learn about sacrificial love.

How Do I Love Thee?

Children are gifts because they enable us to experience a truly sacrificial love by investing in another person. It's the closest we can come to the holy experience of really knowing God's love. We cheapen the phrase in America because we only have one word for love. [In the Greek] there are four kinds of love: *storgē* (affection), *erōs* (romantic love), *philia* (brotherly love), and *agapē*. *Agapē* is the only one that is not subjective, it's objective. *Agapē* love is the very nature of God, who is completely serving others, giving of himself even to the point of sacrificing his Son on the cross. The only way one can understand and experience *agapē* love is to put oneself completely out of the picture. In John 15:13 we read that there's no greater love than to lay your life down for your brother. How we treat human life; how we regard life, is the beginning of

how we understand all of reality. If we miss that, we miss everything. In my book *The Faith* I try to equip Christians to know what they believe, how to defend those beliefs and why it's important to know the basic truths of the Christian faith.¹ In the chapter on life it says if someone claims to be pro-choice—that is taking innocent life for no reason—then they should check whether they're really living in obedience to God and whether they belong in the fellowship of the Christian church. Life is the key to everything.

The single greatest need of the Christian church is to understand that Christianity is not just a relationship with Jesus, it's a way of seeing all reality. The *logos* [is referred to] in John 1:1. Saint John was a Greek and knew what *logos* meant to the Greeks. We translate it as the word, but it meant far more than that. It meant **all** truth that could ever be known, **all** truth that ever was in the world. And it's embodied in Jesus. We reduce God and minimize him from someone all powerful and over everything.

Worldview and Its Implications

Christianity is a worldview because it tells you everything about how you live your life—whether it's law, politics, family, neighborhood, music, science—whatever it is. Christ speaks to each of these issues. And we must understand that we're in a clash of worldviews today. Everyone has a worldview. Your worldview answers four fundamental questions:

1. Where did we come from?
2. Why is there sin and suffering?
3. Is there an answer, is there a way out?
4. What's my purpose, or why am I here?

The first question is fundamental and the answer defines your worldview. This is why all issues about life today begin with the question of where did we come from and what is the nature of what it means to be human? If we get this wrong, nothing else will make sense. Christians answer that we were created in the image of God—*imago Dei*.

I celebrated my 78th birthday in a women's prison in Texas, surrounded by 60 women in white suits. It was a dreary, drab place with no windows. I looked at the women with their scars, no makeup, hair all askew and told them that they were beautiful, and that I could see the image of God in each of them. When you go to prison you lose all of your dignity. I know because of the seven months I spent in prison. They strip search you, take everything away and mail it back home. You're given a number and told to do your time without complaining. But I told those women not to pay any attention to that because their dignity comes from being made in the image of God himself. The women got tears in their eyes and were filled with joy as they came to understand. I've seen it happen in prisons all over the world. You cannot get dignity from your job, from fame, power, from people saying wonderful things about you—none of this gives you dignity. Only the fact that we were created in the image of God gives us dignity.

Secular/naturalists believe in natural selection and evolution and that we're basically “grown up germs.” How can you find dignity in this? You're an accident! An accident doesn't have any dignity or a soul. If it is natural selection, what is the process by which that selection is made? It's the process of survival of the fittest. So the ultimate ethic of secular/naturalism has to be survival. You've succeeded only by surviving at the expense of others.

Christians, instead, believe that every single person is made in the image of God and that everyone is created equal. That everyone has equal dignity and is entitled to complete respect as a human being alone among God's creation. We are His crowning achievement. He created man, created woman and joined them together as one flesh. That's the creation covenant and that's why marriage is so central to us. That's why we have to fight that fight to the last drop of blood in us. Because once you've surrendered that you've

surrendered the creation covenant. You haven't just surrendered the question of marriage, and whether it can be heterosexual or homosexual, you've undermined the creation covenant. We were created in the image of God in order to be joined together as one flesh in order to procreate and raise children—that's the creation covenant.

When Rodney Stark started writing his book, *The Victory of Reason*, he was an agnostic.² He was a sociologist at Berkeley, the University of Washington and is now at Baylor. I featured it on my radio program, "Breakpoint," because it explains how Christianity built the west, and I noted that Stark was an agnostic. Stark called me the next day and said thanks for featuring his book but that I'd made a mistake. He said he was an agnostic when he started writing the book, but by the time he finished he was a Christian. We must examine what Christianity did to build the West, especially its emphasis on human dignity, the understanding of freewill and how it has enabled us to be the great Western civilization that we are.

The Problem of Sin

The next question you have to ask is: if God created all of this, and we're really created in God's image, why is there sin and suffering? That's called the theodicy—how could an all-powerful God be also all-loving at the same time? Albert Einstein believed in God, believed in a rational mind that created the universe, but he couldn't get over the problem of why there was evil. I've talked to some atheist philosophers who've converted and become theists, but they can't understand the God of the Bible because they can't understand the problem of sin. The problem of sin is answered by freewill. God so loved us that he created us in his image, which means his essence is freedom, his essence is love and you can't truly love someone if it's done under compulsion. So every human being had to be given a free will. And our first parents disobeyed. They wanted to be like God. Thereafter, human nature was bent. If you look at human nature today and study it as some psychiatrists and psychologists have done, you'll note their observation that, "Human beings are capable of great good and great evil." All of the problems you see in the world are a result of people having exercised that free will. God could end it in a snap and make us all like puppets, but then you couldn't love him. Or, if you loved him, it wouldn't really be love because it would be compelled. He created us to love us as people created in his image. Human sin causes many problems, but that means humans have responsibility for their own behavior, if not we wouldn't have a sense of responsibility.

One of the things I'm most worried about today is what Alexis de Tocqueville prophesied about America. He said America will have freedom so long as the intermediate structures of the civil society are strong. But if government ever begins to take that over, people will eventually begin to look to government for their happiness rather than God. And that's happening today. That's a very grave threat and our religious freedoms are in great danger. I was a part of a group of about 60 Christian leaders who met in New York to come up with a statement called the Manhattan Declaration. In this declaration we reaffirm our fundamental commitment to life, marriage, and religious liberty and reaffirm that we will not give to Caesar that which is God's, no matter what. We're at a crossroads in our society. We're right at a point where we could tip over exactly as Tocqueville warned.

Oppression and Deliverance

The second question is if you don't start out with life created in the image of God, then you say we're a chance collision and have no dignity. So why is there sin and suffering? Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the famous philosopher who started Enlightenment thought, said, "Everywhere man is born free, but he is in chains." So his thesis was that the reason there's sin and suffering is that society was oppressing him. Karl Marx said the same thing. Sigmund Freud said the same thing, adding that you're sexually inhibited and that's why you're oppressed, and so we should throw off the inhibitions and do anything we feel like doing. And

this would set us free. What it has done has been an invitation to tyrants. If we as human beings have no innate dignity, and there is sin and suffering in the world, then what you've got to do is give me power to impose my ideology, and I'll deliver you from that which is oppressing you.

I've gone back through history and read every single tyrant's writings. Hitler was the most recent, but Pol Pot used to send people off to the killing fields reading Rousseau. The Great Society was filled with this notion in our own country that we could deliver people from oppression through ideology. It is the surest road to tyranny. Give up human dignity, make people simply pawns of the state, and you have tyranny. This is why none of the other worldviews work, because they eliminate the idea of human responsibility.

The third question of whether there is an answer or a way out, you see with secular/naturalism as "worldly utopia." You hear politicians on both parties talking about it all the time saying, "We can create a perfect world." And I cringe whenever they do because they can't create a perfect world. They can govern; they can restrain sin; they can do justice, but they can't create a perfect world—only God can do this . . . and only when people live by God's law.

So what do we [Christians] have? I've preached all over the world about the substitutionary, atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross to free us from our sins. I remember doing it in a Hindu prison with a thousand men all crouching on their haunches as I preached the message about Jesus: You could be born again; your sins could be forgiven; and you could have a new life. Hindus do not understand this because in Eastern religions what you do in this life is what will be done to you in the next life. There's really no hope. I watched these guys' eyes open wide. And then I jumped off the platform and walked in their midst. They were all untouchables and just surrounded me wanting to touch me, with tears flowing down their faces. The Gospel is the greatest liberating message ever given in human history. And it's a historical fact that Christ came in the flesh and was raised from the dead and lives today, and we can live accordingly. That's historically validated. You can prove that Christ rose from the dead, and I would argue that case in any court because the evidence is overwhelming.

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

The final, most pressing issue is: What is my purpose in life? This is what it all comes down to and where the rubber meets the road for us. Once you have the Christian worldview down—the first three points—you then know that you have a purpose. I don't care if you're sick. I don't care if you're disabled. I don't care if you're in a wheelchair like Joni is. I don't care if you're old and feeling weak and feeble. I love getting up in the morning because I know I'm part of God's kingdom, and I'm going to do something today. Maybe it's just a prayer or a smile to someone who is having a bad day, but I'm going to do something to advance God's kingdom. We're never without a purpose. How do you find a purpose if there's no human dignity?

I live in Naples, Florida, where it's beautiful and the CEOs come down to retire at 65 and think they're in heaven. They do their golf every day and their drinks at night and meet with their friends, and after six months they start showing signs of atrophy. They deteriorate because they don't have a reason to keep on living. No one is asking for their advice or deferring to them. So they sit around and talk about how their gardener is doing a poor job. This is death! This is God's waiting room. They are not alive. They don't have any purpose except to eat, drink and be merry! Live it up! But a Christian doesn't believe that, because he believes he's part of a cause and that cause is to advance God's Kingdom. That means helping the poor, ending discrimination, protecting the people who are defenseless and the most vulnerable in our society. That's your purpose.

This is why the battle that is going on right now for the heart and soul of America is a battle for keeps. And the secular/naturalists have the power. Peter Singer at Princeton is the leading advocate of what he calls Utilitarianism. What are your ethics if you weren't created in the image of God? What is the basis of ethics? How do you find a moral truth that applies to all people? You can't if you believe there is no truth,

no moral purpose, no overarching moral standard. We're just in this jungle with people trying to survive. There's no right, there's no wrong. Ethics deteriorate immediately into doing the greatest good for the greatest number. Doesn't that sound like democracy—doing the greatest good for the greatest number?

They asked Columbia Law School students what that question was describing, and they answered that it was describing democracy. Actually, it's Hitler's philosophy. Hitler said, "I'm going to take power, and I'm going to do the greatest good for the greatest number. I'll eliminate the people who are defectives." Under his regime, if you didn't work for two years you went before a hearing board in Germany and if you didn't have a good excuse, you weren't seen again. You disappeared off into a box car and off to a camp where you were gassed. Get rid of the people who can't contribute to society. Get rid of them in utero, get rid of them with infanticide, which is Professor Peter Singer's idea. He says we should see what the child is like, even take a few months or even a year, and if the child isn't going to be what you want then you can kill him. He argues that animal worth is the exact same as human worth. That's why he's very much involved with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. He even said bestiality was natural because all animal life is exactly the same, so why not? A colleague debated him and said if bestiality is fine because all consensual sexual relationships are ok, how does the animal consent? This argument stopped Singer cold for 30 days and then he came back and said you can tell when an animal wants it.

This man is teaching to packed classes at Princeton. Eugenics is back, and it's going mainstream. You see Singer on television all the time. One of his close friends is Robbie George, a professor at Princeton, and one of the brightest men I've ever known. He's the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and says they gave him that chair just to balance out Peter Singer because the alumni were so angry that they'd put Singer as the chair of the Ethics Department. Robbie watches the classes and says the kids pour into Singer's classes with their open minds, and it is so plausible and so logical—if there is no God—that they buy it immediately.

Harriet McBryde Johnson, a great disability rights advocate but an atheist with whom I've had long conversations, debated Singer and lost because Singer couldn't imagine how an atheist could believe anything else. And an atheist can't. Harriet McBryde Johnson, who has since died, was a very effective advocate for the rights of the disabled, but there are no rights inherent to the disabled if there are no rights inherent for human beings. So she lost the debate.

This is why I say it all comes back to life, and why I say Joni's role within the Christian world and the world at-large today is so incredibly important. Because she disputes the arguments that became so fashionable in the early 1920s in London, Germany, Berlin, in Philadelphia, New York, among The Metaphysical Club at Harvard, and with Oliver Wendell Holmes. He handed down the Buck decision on the Supreme Court—the most offensive decision ever—in which he sterilized a poor woman because she had come from a family which had three generations of mental disability. The Supreme Court of the United States ordered that woman to be sterilized. And famously in his decision he said, "Three imbeciles are enough for one family." Oh my! We believed that stuff back in the 20s, and we believe it today. Ironically, it's the liberals who are advancing this in the name of liberalism. It's pure nonsense. It's saying that if you're among the majority you're okay, but if you're on the margins of society, see you later.

The Battle Cry

I am convinced that the biggest single weakness of the church is that we have a reductionist view of Christianity—it's just me and Jesus. We think we're in good shape. Jesus is taking care of me, and I've got a great relationship with Jesus. That's an abomination! Jesus is the *logos*, the source of all truth, all understanding about all of life. We Christians have got to get active.

There was a study and a *Newsweek* cover story that said religion is declining in America because it showed that religion was down 10 percent by the various measures.³ I got the sub-data and studied it

myself and found that all of the decline was in liberal churches. It's because they're not offering us anything. Actually, the evangelical or born-again people were increasing. So there's a sifting going on in the church. I want the church to understand what you believe, and then I want you to understand that Christianity is a worldview and has to be lived out. I want you to understand the implications of the answers to each of these questions. This is what drove men like William Wilberforce. He saw Christianity as a worldview. That's what drove him on a 20-year campaign to abolish the slave trade because he could not imagine that we would take black bodies and put them in the hulls of ships when they're created in the image of God. That was his argument on the floor of the parliament as shown in the movie "Amazing Grace."

You are sitting as heirs to the greatest understanding of reality human beings can have—that's the Christian worldview. Yet we're losing to a minority of cultural elites in our culture because we don't know how to make our case. I teach an hour-long lecture on a proposition made many years ago by Cornelius Van Til: The Christian understanding of reality, the Christian worldview, constitutes the only rational view of understanding reality. All others are false. What's the test of truth? That which corresponds to the way things really are—that's what truth is. I would argue that you can empirically validate that Christianity is the only rational way to live, and therefore conforms to reality and therefore is truth.

We're fighting a battle for our lives. We're fighting a battle for the life of our culture, for human dignity, for values in our society when it comes to marriage and life and the fundamental choices. We're fighting a battle for religious liberty. We've got the case, the facts, and the best argument. If we fail, it's on our doorstep. We just didn't make the case we had. We're not willing to get serious enough to think through the implications of what we believe and understand it in order to be able to winsomely present it to the world.

We have a wonderful case if we will just teach ourselves and learn to apply ourselves enough to make it. And then make it lovingly. That's the beauty of Joni—she's always smiling! I have a friend who was running a church in Madison, Wisconsin. He is a former marine and a black man who hated whites until his conversion. During a sermon, homosexual advocates broke in and threw condoms at the altar disrupting the service, and this man was smiling through the whole thing. The press came up and asked why he didn't get mad at the protestors. He replied, "I have no more reason to be mad with them, than if a blind man had stepped on my foot." Be loving! The ultimate goal of faith is love—*agapē* love! So we've got a great case, if we make it with love.

Notes

1. Chuck Colson and Harold Fickett, *The Faith* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2008.)
2. Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason* (Random House: New York, 2005.)
3. Jon Meacham, "End of Christian America," *Newsweek*, 9 April, 2009.

About the Author

Chuck Colson (1931–2012) was a popular and widely known author, speaker, and radio commentator. A former presidential aide to Richard Nixon and founder of Prison Fellowship, Breakpoint, and the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview, he wrote many books—including *Born Again*, *Loving God*, *How Now Shall We Live?*, *The Good Life* and *The Faith Given Once, for All*—that have shaped Christian thinking on a variety of subjects. In 1993, Chuck was awarded the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. In 2008, President Bush conferred on him the second highest civilian award of the U.S. government, the Presidential Citizen Medal for his humanitarian work with Prison Fellowship. He was a graduate of Brown University and George Washington Law School, and received his juris doctor with honors. He served in the United States Marine Corps, attaining the rank of Captain. He and his wife Patty have three children and five grandchildren.