

FOUNDATIONS
FOR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

THE LAW OF GOD (5): UNSEEN THINGS



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (5): Unseen Things
T. M. Moore
Susie Moore, Editor and Finisher

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Contents

Welcome to <i>Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (5)</i>	4
1 Real, Reliable, Now, and Forever	5
2 The Soul	7
3 Sin	10
4 Spiritual Beings	13
5 Heaven	15
6 The Power of the Word	17
7 The Power of Faith	20
Questions for Reflection of Discussion	22

Welcome to *Foundations for Christian Worldview:
The Law of God (5): Unseen Things*

Next to God, the most important aspects of our worldview vision are things we can't see.

Wait. What? If we can't see them, how can they be part of our vision?

Because our vision derives from the Word of God, and God tells us these unseen things exist and that they matter. We don't need to see them. Instead, we listen to the Lord and bring our lives into conformity with the vision He casts for us, replete with such unseen things as the soul, sin, angels, heaven, and more.

How that works, and why it is so important, is the subject of this part of our study.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Real, Reliable, Now, and Forever

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” Deuteronomy 6.4

Worldview vision

Our investigations thus far into the worldview that begins to emerge in the Law of God have focused on four topics.

First, we said that a Christian worldview will have Jesus Christ as its defining feature and driving force. Even though Jesus does not appear in the Law of God, we understand from Jesus (cf. Jn. 5.39) that the Law points to Him and calls us to see in Him the only hope of true, full, good, and abundant life.

Second, we established a framework for considering the question of worldview, a framework that shapes up around three facets – vision, disciplines, and outcomes. We are looking at these as legs of a triangle, which interact and work together to support and strengthen the worldview as a whole.

Third, we made some general observations which will guide our study not only as we discover the Christian worldview in the Law of God, but throughout the rest of Scripture as well. Among those, we observed that the Christian worldview is both spiritual and religious, and that it holds out the promise of life and grace to all who embrace it.

Finally, we began looking at the primary components of the vision leg of our Christian worldview triangle, by making some observations about God. He is the focal point and objective of all Christian life. That which is ultimately good and true is the Three-in-One God, Who is eternal, holy, sovereign, gracious, and self-revealing. By increasing in the knowledge of God, especially as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, we may have true insight to all things good and true. The clearer and more compelling our *vision*, the more we will take up the *disciplines* and demonstrate the *outcomes* that characterize Christian worldview living.

This all makes good sense to the believer in Jesus Christ. Most of the time, anyway. But in our increasingly secular and materialistic age, we might be inclined to suppose that our worldview lacks a bit of solidity by being so firmly based in faith and unseen things.

But we need to recall what we have previously discussed about the nature of *all* worldviews.

Two points

Early in our study, we made two important points: First, every worldview, even the most materialistic and secular, operates by faith, and is therefore *religious* in all aspects. Those who reject the Christian worldview as merely a *faith* endeavor must be reminded that in this, their own worldview is no different from ours.

Second, all worldviews are rooted in unseen realities. All people hope for and strive toward that which they do not now possess, and which is therefore unseen, except in their imaginations. Such unseen things include whatever they may consider their greatest good, what they most hope to realize in life.

For example, let’s say that the driving force of their life – their *vision* – is to retire comfortably and be able to live as they wish, without worry. That may indeed be a very attractive *vision*, engendering exciting goals and best-laid plans; however, it remains unseen and merely *possible* until they actually achieve it. And even when it has been achieved, it is not necessarily secure, since material goods and conditions can be frail and fleeting, not to mention unsatisfying and unfulfilling.

Those whose worldview orients toward material things must live by *faith* in what they do not yet *see*, and

which, having achieved it, may not prove to satisfy all the hopes they nurtured as they envisioned it.

The big difference

The difference between the worldview of Scripture and all other worldviews is that the unseen realities in which the Biblical worldview is rooted, and to which it aspires, are real, reliable, and available now and forever. God is real; He is faithful and unchanging; we can know Him now, and we will abide with Him forever. Similarly, the soul, angels, heaven, and the power of God's Word and faith are real. Also real and to be reckoned with now are such things as sin and fallen angels. And while even these realities will continue forever, they will not forever exercise sway over those who believe.

These unseen things are not mere possibilities. They truly exist, can be certainly known and experienced, and are of such a nature that we may benefit from them now. When realized according to God's intentions, these unseen things do not disappoint. They direct and shape the thinking, desires, and lifestyle of those whose vision, goals, and aspirations derive from Scripture, beginning in the Law of God.

In the Christian worldview, the unseen things that direct and motivate us are *real* and *reliable*, and they are available *now* and *forever*. They exist in a real albeit unseen place, entirely independent of our imaginations, but not beyond our attainment. And they have real power to shape the lives of those who envision and engage them, and to bring goodness, peace, joy, and pleasure to those who seek them.

The Biblical worldview grows out of the worldview kernel deposited in God's Law. It does not surprise us that, in God's Law, the unseen Lord holds out His unseen promises, first of all to be received in the unseen part of the human being – the soul. We do not, in the first instance, love God with the strength of our physical members, doing and obeying in a merely rote and robotic manner. This is not the way to know God and to experience the life He promises. Our first calling is to engage the Lord and His Word in our souls – heart, mind, and conscience – and then, as our God-enthralled souls direct, to bring our lives into conformity with and obedience to His Law.

Faith, the writer of Hebrews tells us, is the *assurance* of things hoped for and the *evidence* of things not seen. As we shall see, such faith engenders real, but unseen, power for living the Christian worldview. The assurance we possess of the reality and availability of unseen things *now* begins in the soul, where the unseen aspects of our own being connect and interact with the unseen realities of God and the unseen realm.

And it is to those unseen realities, beginning with the soul, that we turn in this installment of our study on the worldview of God's Law.

For reflection

1. Why do we insist that all worldviews are based on unseen realities, and therefore must be lived by faith?
2. What do we mean by saying that the unseen realities of the Christian worldview are both *real* and *now*?
3. What would be some examples of the kind of unseen realities that make up the Christian worldview vision?

Next steps – Conversation: Meditate on Hebrews 11.1 Then talk with a Christian friend about the role of unseen things in the Christian life.

2 The Soul

“You shall love the LORD with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6.5

The campaign to eliminate God

Adherents to a secular worldview are embarked upon an all-out, no compromise effort to reduce all of human experience to material causes and effects.

This is not a new effort. It has been under way since at least the latter part of the 18th century, when French *encyclopedists* published their compendium of all human knowledge in a deliberate attempt to write God out of human experience.

That effort has continued and grown within the intricate labs and from behind the white coats, mystical language, and impressive results of the modern scientific enterprise. Increasingly, scientists in a wide range of disciplines are working to deepen and extend our understanding of the cosmos and its creatures without any resort to God or spiritual realities whatsoever. In so doing, the modern scientific enterprise unmoored itself from its Christian and Biblical origins, and set sail on a course of defining a brave, new world apart from God.

Of course, they cannot deny the existence of religion. The vast majority of the world’s people hold to one form of religion or another. Instead, scientists catalog religion under either philosophy or psychology – or indeed, psychosis – and explain it in purely naturalistic terms.

And they are largely succeeding. Look at the schools. Consider the curricula of our institutions of higher learning. Observe where governments invest their research dollars (in the billions annually). God and spiritual realities don’t count, aren’t necessary, and are explained away as mere fabrications of unenlightened imaginations.

We do not deny the validity or value of science; nor do we fail to appreciate its many great achievements – all of which are indications of the unfathomable common grace of God toward even those who deny Him.

Yet we insist that science, or any endeavor, which denies the existence of God and the unseen realities of human life and the cosmos sets a course that cannot achieve goals for science, humankind, and the cosmos which are uniformly good and true.

The denial of unseen things reaches with drastic effects into the everyday life of every human being. For, led by scan-infatuated neuroscientists, modern science is set on eliminating the soul as a necessary condition of human existence. In the modern catalog of what must be known, no place exists for the soul, person, mind, heart, conscience, or will. All our behaviors are determined by material factors, originating both within us and outside us. “The cosmos is all there is or was or ever will be,” chirped the late Carl Sagan, thus codifying in a slogan the secular belief that all that is and matters can be seen, felt, tasted, heard, held, touched, and – most importantly – controlled and shaped by human beings.

The soul in God’s Law

The Law of God teaches otherwise. Every human being has a soul, and if the pattern established in Genesis 2 still holds, the soul of every human being is created by God at the moment they become living persons – the moment of conception (cf. Pss. 139.13; 33.15; Zech. 12.1; Lk. 11.39, 40). All that is truly human begins in the soul, where the *heart* manages and improves our affections, the *mind* receives and analyzes information, and the *conscience* curates our values, and gives guidance to and arbitrates between our feelings and thoughts.

When God commands His people to love Him with all their heart, soul, and mind, He is saying that such components exist, that each person is in possession of these, and that we must learn to discipline these unseen aspects of our lives so that they are shaped and grow on the cornerstone and within the framework of total, uncompromised, increasing love for God.

Our text indicates that mind, heart, and soul truly exist. We must not try to force God into our way of thinking, or we will consider that mind and heart are separate from soul, and no such thing as conscience exists. Scripture does not always think the way we do. Mind and heart exist, since God clearly and often refers to them, or their functions (thinking, desiring, fearing, considering, learning, and the like). “Soul” in this context functions as a catch-all, a single term encompassing all that makes up the soul. The conscience is more assumed than acknowledged in the Law of God. We see its acknowledgement in the many passages demanding that the people of God rule in their affections, reorganize their thinking, make decisions in line with God’s will, and hold priorities (such as keeping the Lord’s Day) that are important simply because God says they are.

The soul is the driving force in human life. It is where the image of God is lodged, which enables us to know, fear, commune with, love, and obey God; and which thus serves as the animating power for the motions of our bodies, whether by words or deeds.

The neglect of the soul, every Christian understands, can cause us to stray from the good and true way of the Lord, so that we miss the blessings of righteousness, peace, and joy He intends for us. How much more damage is being done in the world because of the secular world’s *denial* that the soul even exists?

Know the soul, know the Lord

The more we understand about the unseen aspect of the human life – the soul – the better able we will be to know the Lord, Who gives His Law and holds out the promises which obedience to that Law brings within our grasp.

As we shall see, God not only speaks His Law to our souls, but He instructs His people concerning how they must engage the different aspects of their souls with Him, training and disciplining, shaping and improving their affections, thinking, and priorities to seek the Lord and His promises above everything else.

Unless we first gain mastery over the inward, unseen parts of our lives, we will never enjoy the abundant blessings God holds out to us in His precious and very great promises.

But the Law of God ultimately points our soul beyond itself, to the full realization of the Law *and* the promises in our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1.4; 2 Cor. 1.20). On our own, apart from the regenerating work of God’s Spirit, we have no heart for God or His promises, much less for His Law. We cannot think about God and His will, for we are in rebellion against Him. And in place of the divine priorities of the Law of God and all His Word, we will pollute our souls with our own best ideas about what’s good for us.

Israel’s experience under the Law of God, apart from the work of the Spirit of God, would be frustrating and disastrous, for they lacked the heart and soul for God which only the Spirit can give (Deut. 30.1-10). Only as we come to know Jesus Christ, cling to Him, and seek His Kingdom and righteousness, in the power of His Spirit, are our souls renewed and transformed, so that the righteousness of God’s Law and the full and abundant life of God’s promises begin to be ours.

For reflection

1. Why would those who hold to a secular worldview want to do away with the soul? What do they put in place of the soul as determining human action?

2. The soul consists of three interacting and often overlapping spiritual components: mind, heart, and conscience. How do you understand the function of each of these?

3. Why is it important that we learn from God how to grow and improve our soul? What can happen if we don't?

Next steps – Transformation: How do you experience growth in your soul? Can you think of one way each of the components of your soul has grown lately? Share this exercise with a Christian friend.

3 Sin

So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Genesis 4.6, 7

The reality of sin

As the people of Israel waited on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, God surveyed their readiness. His report to Moses was not encouraging: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5.29) Implying, of course, that the people did *not* have such a heart, that they would *not* fear God and always obey Him, and that, as a consequence, things would *not* go well with them for very long.

The question arises: Why, given all Israel had witnessed of the greatness and graciousness of God, and in view of the precious and very great promises He held out to them – why did the people have such a difficult time getting in step with His Law?

The answer is found in yet another unseen component of the worldview which we begin to discover in the Law of God: sin. Already, in the earliest chapters of the Law, sin is active among the fallen people of God, crouching like a lion to devour whoever refuses to prepare against its terrible power.

Sin, as the apostle John explained, is transgression of the Law of God (1 Jn. 3.4). Sin, Paul explained, is whatever we do apart from faith in God (Rom. 14.23). When we break the Law, we sin. When we trust our best judgment rather than God's, we sin. Sin has destructive consequences for us and the people affected by our sin. Sin dulls the heart, so that we do not love God as we ought, but focus our desires on ourselves and created things. Sin encourages us to make up our own minds about right and wrong and good and evil, and to consider that we know better than God what will get us to the true and good life we desire.

And – unless our hearts have become completely hardened – sin always leaves us dissatisfied and disappointed, ridden with guilt and shame, and very often, with broken and abused people in our wake.

Sin is very real. The word may sound quaint to sophisticated moderns, and they may prefer to think that no such thing as sin exists. But everyone will agree that people do wrong. People hurt one another. People violate the rights of their neighbors. People steal and maim and oppress and cheat. People bully. People lie and betray one another. People, that is, sin.

But *why* do we sin?

Because of sin.

Set-of-the-soul

The rebellion of Adam and Eve introduced the unseen power of sin into the cosmos, concentrated in the souls of human beings (cf. Rom. 5.12). Sin affects every aspect of creation, beginning in the hearts, minds, and consciences of people. Our natural set-of-the-soul is ruled *by* sin and therefore *unto* sinning. Sins and sinning we can see; sin, we cannot. But it is the reality of *sin* that makes *sinning* and *sins* a problem to be reckoned with by all people.

Sin is that spiritual malady that turns the heart and all the soul away from God and His Law, and that affects the entire creation of God in ways contrary to His good and perfect will. We cannot see sin as such, but we can see it in action. Sin was active in Israel from the day God delivered them from Egypt. It continued active

throughout their journey in the wilderness. And it was present and active in the hearts of His people, even as they prepared to cross the Jordan and enter the land of promise.

God knew this full well; nevertheless, He lamented the lack of a heart for Him within His people, and He looked forward to the day when He would “operate” on their hearts so that, overcoming the power of sin, they would hear and obey Him (cf. Deut. 30.1-10; Ezek. 36.26, 27). God would not leave His people in sin; He promised to establish a new set-of-the-soul in them, so that they would learn what is true and good, and would overcome the evil that lingers in their soul with good works of love for God and their neighbors.

But until God accomplished this work in them, the people of Israel, in spite of their many accomplishments, would be ruled by hearts like that of Cain – hearts laden with self-interest, jealousy, rage, greed, and murder.

God knew the hearts of His people were ruled by sin and self-interest. Nevertheless, He commanded them to walk in the ways of His Law; and, knowing they would fail, He provided means, through offerings, sacrifices, and Sabbaths, for them to be continually renewed in His grace. God shows, beginning in His Law, that, while sin is endemic in the soul, grace can overcome it.

Sin and sins

The Law of God takes into account the *sin* as well as the *sins* of people. It does not excuse disobedience, because of sin; rather, it commands obedience, because of grace. Grace ever exists from God to carry us through our transgressions into His favor once again. Grace to overcome evil with good is available to all who seek it from the Lord, even as early as God’s warning to Cain.

In the Law, this grace could be known through sacrifices and offerings, which served to cover, for the time, the *sins* of God’s people. The heart could be readied with grace by reading and meditating in the Law of God, seeking Him in prayer, and avoiding those practices which are known to be contrary to God’s will.

Yet beyond this, the Law pointed the people forward to the greater obedience and the perfect sacrifice and offering of a Lamb without spot or blemish – even our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 7-9). In Him the Law is fulfilled, the sacrifices are complete, and grace is available to even the most wretched of sinners. In Him not only are *sins* forgiven and cleansed, but *sin* itself is destroyed forever.

Forgiveness of sin, and the renewal of our souls, sets us, by God’s Spirit, on a path of obedience in which grace carries us step by step into greater degrees of Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18). God still commands us to obey His Law (Rom. 7.12; Matt. 5.17-19; 1 Jn. 2.1-6). He still warns us against sin’s destructive powers (1 Pet. 5.8). But now He gives us the *heart* and His own Spirit to set our souls for love, so that we will and do according to His pleasure, overcoming the evil of sin with the power of Christ’s righteousness (Rom. 12.21; Phil. 2.12, 13).

Sin still has a destructive place in the worldview we find in Scripture, but the true believer, clinging to Christ and walking in God’s Word and Spirit, is set free from the murderous power of sin into the newness of God’s grace and love (Jn. 8.31-36).

For reflection

1. How would you explain the idea of sin to an unbelieving friend?
2. How can we know that an unseen spiritual malady – sin – abides in the hearts of people? What dangers result from denying this unseen reality?
3. What do we mean by saying that grace overcomes sin? How do we see that in the Law? To what greater grace does the Law point? How does it do that?

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (5): Unseen Things

Next steps – Transformation: Meditate on 1 John 1.8-10. How should believers deal with sin? How often should they do this? Is this part of your daily walk with the Lord?

4 Spiritual Beings

“For My angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them...” Exodus 23.23, 24

An unseen spiritual world

Among the unseen aspects of the worldview vision that emerges in the Law of God, the reality of unseen spiritual beings other than God is indicated. The people of Israel were to understand that the unseen realm is populated by other creatures, spiritual in nature, which fulfill various purposes among the peoples of the earth.

In addition to the Angel of the LORD, the Law mentions cherubim as other spiritual beings which serve the purposes of God. We’re not given much detail concerning these servants of God, but we are to understand that they are real and so closely associated with God Himself that they always have His interests and will in mind – which is to say, they always have the interests of God’s people in mind. The many representations of cherubim in the tabernacle would have reminded the people of Israel that around them unseen creatures of great beauty and power served the purposes of God on their behalf.

But the Law also intimates the presence in the unseen realm of spiritual beings favorable neither to God nor to His people. Their purposes were more violent and destructive.

Apart from “the serpent”, the Law does no more than suggest the existence of unseen spiritual forces of wickedness. It does so by its many mentions of the gods of the various pagan nations, and by strict warnings to God’s people to have nothing to do with these. There is only one God, as we have seen; how then to account for the many false deities served in so many abominable ways by the various pagan peoples? No explanation is given, but the reality of unseen powers of evil is clearly intimated. God does not want His people to be overly curious about possible spiritual forces or powers beyond those which He reveals to them, at least, not at this stage in the covenant.

Yet we suspect they are there, for false religion and the worship of terrible deities are ubiquitous among the pagan peoples of the day. The first and second commandments are designed, at least in part, to discourage peering into the unseen realm of wickedness on the part of God’s people. They must be aware of it, but not curious about it. And they must not indulge any of the practices of those peoples who sought contact with that aspect of the spiritual realm.

It was to be enough for God’s people then – and now – to know that these creatures exist, but to have nothing whatsoever to do with them.

The importance of these spiritual beings, and the role they will play in the unfolding story of God’s covenant, can be seen especially in two prominent unseen creatures – the Angel of the LORD and Satan.

The Angel of the Lord

The Angel of the LORD appears in the Law of God as a spiritual being sometimes identified with God and sometimes separate from Him. He speaks with the voice of God, with the authority of God, and in the Name of God. The word *angel* means simply, *messenger*. So when the Angel of the LORD speaks, He is the Word of God Who brings the message of God to His people. In this respect, the Angel of the LORD may be a kind of pre-incarnate manifestation of the second Person of the divine Trinity.

The Angel of the LORD can manifest Himself within the created order as He goes about to do God’s work

(Num. 22.22ff). Does this also suggest a fuller and more potent “on the ground” manifestation of the Word in days to come?

We do not receive much explanation about the Angel of the LORD, but the impression we get from the times He appears is that He is a Being of great power and authority. His Word is to be received and obeyed without question. He represents God and comes to do God’s will on behalf of His people.

Satan

The second prominent spiritual being mentioned in the Law of God is Satan. We see him only in the garden of Eden, in Genesis 3. After that, he does not appear in the Law, although we can see the effects of his opposition to God in the sin that everywhere abounds in the books of Moses.

How did sin become established as a continuing condition effecting the human soul and the creation? The Law of God explains that sin entered through the rebellion of Adam and Eve, which was instigated by Satan, the serpent from of old (Rev. 20.2).

The Law of God presents Satan as a reality, but it does not reveal much about him. He is not even named in the Law; rather, he took the form of a serpent, and this is how the Lord was pleased to refer to him. He makes but one appearance in all the Law of God, but we are to understand that this was enough. By his guile and deceit, he plunged the creation into sin and trouble. It would take a mighty act of God to redeem, not only the people He had chosen for Himself, but the entire vast cosmos which He loves (Jn. 3.16).

We do not learn anything more about Satan until we get beyond the Law of God. All we know from the Law is that he exists in the unseen realm, and he is in some way related to the fallen and sinful condition of men. In the New Testament we learn that, just as God is attended by a great host of holy spiritual beings, Satan is attended by a large number of spiritual beings which joined him in rebelling against God, and were cast down to earth to spread the misery of sin throughout creation.

But the fact that so little is said about Satan in the Law of God reminds us that the story of humankind is not about Satan and the baleful effects of sin; it is about God and His grace, and His plan for ensuring that the world would know and enjoy His glory.

Sin has a “personal face” in the Law of God, but he is kept largely out of sight as God sets the stage for His glorious work of redemption and renewal in the unfolding of His covenant.

For reflection

1. Why do we need to keep in mind that we exist within a vast realm of unseen spiritual beings?
2. How does the Angel of the LORD point forward to the coming of the Word of God in flesh?
3. How can believers help one another to be more mindful of these unseen beings?

Next steps – Preparation: Should the work of angels have a larger role in your Christian worldview? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

5 Heaven

*And he blessed him and said:
“Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”* Genesis 14.19, 20

The materialist agenda

The dominant worldview of our day – secular materialism – advertises its convictions in the widely-repeated words of the late Carl Sagan: “The cosmos is all there is, or was, or ever will be.” All we need to know, whatever we may take as a point of reference for values or direction, and all we may aspire to is only and purely materialistic in nature. The good and true life is that which conforms to the demands, and knows how to exploit the opportunities, of a universe that is only matter, in one form or another, and that only matters to us because we prefer to live well rather than to suffer and die.

The materialist worldview is embraced as an act of faith. No one can know by the tenets of the modern scientific enterprise – the high priesthood of secular materialism – whether what Dr. Sagan asserted is true. The materialistic nature of the universe is simply assumed as an act of faith; and, as with every unprovable assumption and faith assertion, it may be incorrect.

However, this materialistic worldview is taught, promoted, and pursued as if it *were* correct, as if were *true* and the *only viable way of understanding our lives and the world*. Secular materialism has established a hegemonic perspective on the world and everything in it, and it uses all its accumulated muscle to propagate that view as if it were indisputably true.

But the worldview that begins to emerge in the Law of God – the Christian worldview – denies the claims of Carl Sagan and the materialist worldview, and in particular, the secularist slogan, on three counts. First, the material cosmos is *not* all there is. God exists, as do other spiritual beings, and other unseen things, such as the soul and sin.

Second, the material cosmos is *not* all there ever was, since it and everything in it came into being out of nothing at some point, and since God has existed from all eternity.

And third, the cosmos is *not* all that ever will be, for God will always be, the souls of people will continue forever, and this universe will one day be dramatically transformed into a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells.

There’s more to this vast cosmos than meets the eye, and failing to understand and value the unseen things of our worldview will deprive us of its power and promise. The created universe is more than merely matter, and among the unseen things of which the cosmos is comprised is heaven.

The fact of heaven

The Scriptures do not provide a definition of heaven. Instead, we must deduce the fact and nature of heaven from isolated references, which, in the Law of God, are sufficient to establish the reality of this mysterious realm.

Heaven is a spiritual domain rather than a physical space. We cannot go there in our bodies, and heaven is not contained within the material cosmos, but is often referred to as above or beyond it – the “heaven of heavens.” God “owns” heaven; He is Lord and Master there, the only God among a great many other

spiritual beings (Gen 14.22; Deut. 4.39; Gen. 28.12). Heaven is the “holy habitation” of God, yet because it is a creation of God (Gen. 1.1), it cannot contain Him. It appears to be more like an office than a domicile – the place from which God orchestrates His plans and conducts His work.

God is not alone in heaven. The Angel of the Lord is there, as well as other angels (Gen. 28.12) who interface with people according to God’s Word.

The suggestion is made that heaven and earth have some kind of interface, as Jacob saw in his dream (Gen. 28). From His dwelling place in heaven, God “remembers” His covenant with His people; that is, He attends to it continuously, carrying out His promises and dealing with nations and the world to advance His purposes on earth (Ex. 2-15).

Though heaven is a spiritual domain, it is intimately engaged with earth, and with the people of the earth. God possesses both heaven and earth, and He does in and on them whatsoever accords with His purpose. God in heaven can hear when people cry to Him (Gen. 21.17). He communicates with people from heaven, either by speaking Himself or by sending His Angel. And He sends His angels to earth to accomplish His purposes.

For earth’s sake!

It has sometimes been observed of certain Christians that they can be “so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good.” The comment is aimed at those whose view of salvation is defined by the promise of going to heaven when they die. In the meantime, they do their best not to become involved in matters of the world, not even to pursue the good works for which they have been redeemed and for which they should be equipped, zealous, and ready at all times (Eph. 2.10; 2 Tim. 3.15-17; Tit. 2.14; 3.8, 14).

An equal danger lies in being so *unmindful* concerning heaven that we allow the secular and materialist worldview to define the parameters of our faith. We *believe* in heaven and all that goes on there, but the *fact* of heaven does not much affect the way we live in the here and now. Heaven is a there-and-then concept for too many Christians, who have not learned how to tap the power of heaven – of God and His Word and angels – to bring the rule of heaven’s God to earth in ways that reflect the rule of God in heaven (cf. Matt. 6.10, 33).

For earth’s sake, and everyone and everything in it, we must not allow the dead-end worldview of secular materialism to define the values, structures, priorities, policies, and hopes of life on earth. God in heaven intends His creation to realize its full and flourishing goodness, but it will not do so as long as the bonds and blinders of an unbelieving worldview keep it from our view and grasp. Believers must pray and work – as God expected of Abraham and Moses – for the will of God in heaven to be realized among the peoples and creatures of earth. We must devote ourselves to understanding and engaging this aspect of our Christian worldview as did our forebears of old.

Questions for reflection

1. How would you explain heaven to an unbelieving friend? How would you expect your friend to reply? Why?
2. What role does the fact of heaven play in your own life?
3. What are we asking for when we pray that God’s will might be done on earth as in heaven? What does praying this way require of how we live?

Next steps – Preparation: Talk with a Christian friend about the role of heaven in Christian life. How can you encourage one another to be more truly and consistently heaven-minded? Why should you?

6 The Power of the Word

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. Genesis 1.3

Heard and unheard

When we think of the Word of God, the Scriptures naturally come to mind. The Scriptures are certainly a tangible thing – something we can see and handle. The words written down in Scripture are in familiar forms. There is nothing magical about them; they can be easily read, understood, and interpreted, with a little practice and due diligence. The Scriptures are true and reliable altogether, and we praise God for the great privilege of His giving such written revelation to us, beginning in the days of Moses.

But we also include the Word of God in the category of *unseen* things because by far and away, most of that which God speaks does not fall on the ears of human beings, or come before their eyes. God’s Word is active and powerful regardless of whether anyone ever hears it. Should the Word of God be spoken in the forest – as it is at every moment and in uncountable ways – though no one were around to hear it, it certainly will have the effects God desires.

So as we consider the power of the Word of God as revealed in His Law, we’re thinking primarily of that Word which does not come to the ears or eyes of men like Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. We’re thinking of the Word that operates in the background of creation, the Word which explains and sustains creation, and without which, creation itself could not exist, not even for a moment.

The unseen, unheard Word of God is real and powerful, and, next to God Himself, it is the most important facet of the unseen things in our Christian worldview.

Let’s note three ways in which the unheard Word of God is active and powerful: in its power to create, its power to define, and its power to rule.

Power to create

The power of the unseen, unheard Word of God for creating is mysterious and immense. In Genesis 1, Moses records the creation of the cosmos and everything in it. No one was present when God spoke the cosmos into existence. But *that* His Word brought forth everything out of nothing is clear from the record of Genesis 1. We’re not sure how the knowledge of creation came to people. Perhaps God explained it all to Adam, and Adam simply passed the report along faithfully, as did the generations of the sons of God who succeeded him.

God’s work of creating by a Word is unique, so much so, that the Hebrew uses a special verb, בָּרָא (*bara* – He created), to report His work. This verb rarely occurs in the Old Testament, and when it does, nearly always God is its subject and God’s work of creation is the context. Only God can בָּרָא by *speaking* things into existence. His unseen, unheard Word is powerful to make something out of nothing.

And that is a very great power, indeed. It is a blasphemous and foolhardy tenet of unbelieving faith to insist that the cosmos is eternal – that God *did not* speak it into being. And it is equally blasphemous and a foolhardy tenet of misguided faith to say, “Well, OK, God spoke it all into being, but He had to do it in the way science says.” Who are we to tell God what He can or cannot *say*? It’s like telling Jesus, “Look, if You want to make wine, You have to follow proper protocols.”

Power to define

When God creates, God also defines. The naturalistic view of the cosmos insists that nothing has any real identity until human beings give it a name, describe its principles and propensities, and assign it a place in the world as we define and know it. All the stuff of the cosmos is just that, unnamed, valueless stuff, until people

– read: scientists – give it a name and assign it a role according to our understanding of the world.

But this is not what the Scriptures teach. God named the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, stars, waters, land, and the general categories of plants and animals. God defines the nature of humankind and what our purpose should be. His Word tells us what things are and what they are for in large, general categories of being, and that they are good to the extent that they are used according to His intended purposes. Within that defining framework, people are assigned the task of further discovering, naming, and using the stuff of creation. But this must be done within the limits of God’s defined and declared purposes, or we run the risk of abusing the creation God intends should serve our needs.

God’s Word defines right and wrong in human conduct as well. He has written His Word on the heart of every human being, as we discover from later revelation (cf. Rom. 2.14, 15); and we see that fact at work throughout the Law of God. Some people are identified as evil, and some are identified as good, and those definitions derive from God and His counsel, together with the Word He has written on the hearts of people and revealed in His Law. The unseen, unheard Word of God is inscribed on the heart of every person. With the mind we *understand* that Word, and by the exercise of conscience we translate its implications to *the will*.

Power to rule

Finally, we note that the unseen Word of God has power to rule, that is to direct, sustain, extend, and employ all aspects of the seen world, whether in patterns of consistency and predictability, or for His own extraordinary purposes. God can burn within a bush, and not consume it. He can cover a mountain with fire and smoke, and not destroy it. He can bring quails out of nowhere; marshal hosts of frogs and locusts to confound a world leader; part a sea and dry its bed so that people can walk across; and much, much more. And He does all this without an audible word, but by speaking to the creation in ways human beings cannot hear.

But what does this suggest? That is, if God can intervene to incite the creation to motions that are *not* according to its usual patterns, does this not indicate that He, by His unheard Word, is sustaining the *normal* patterns and motions of the creatures of the vast cosmos? That would certainly seem to be the case. We call something a *miracle* only because it seems unusual to us. But what we’re seeing is merely the creation in some form obeying a momentary change of instructions from the sovereign God, Whose unheard Word sustains the cosmos and everything in it at all times.

The penchant of unbelieving cosmologists to talk about such things as “cosmic background noise”, “dark energy”, and “dark matter” as the framework and explanation for the seen cosmos is an act of disrespect and even blasphemy. Such things may well exist, but they are not the last things, the ultimate explanations or sustaining powers of the cosmos.

God is, as is His unseen, unheard – but always present, and always to be reckoned with – Word.

Questions for reflection

1. Why does this matter? Why is it important that we understand that God’s *unheard* and *unseen* Word is always being spoken to the cosmos?
2. Should we expect to be able to learn something of God’s Word by reading and using the creation as He intends? Explain.
3. Since God’s Word undergirds and sustains everything in the cosmos, everything in the cosmos has the potential for revealing and glorifying Him. But how does that happen?

Next steps – Conversation: Spend the day making observations about the power of God’s Word in creation. Look around you.

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (5): Unseen Things

Think of what God is saying to the creation. Make some notes and reflect on what you learn about God from them. Share your observations with a Christian friend.

7 The Power of Faith

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. Genesis 15.6

Without faith

All worldviews operate on the basis of faith. That is, whatever views one holds about the nature of the world and our place in it, faith operates at the most foundational levels. We have said before that this is part of what makes all worldviews – including the secular worldview – religious in nature. Living by faith is inescapable, including for those who deny the need for faith in their worldview.

But what is faith?

Faith is the soul's response to that which we perceive as ultimately good, true, and desirable – the Christian would say, God. Faith takes the form of agreement, submission, and readiness to obey – that is, of *assurance* that the thing hoped-for is what is best and true. What God is seeking on the part of those whose worldview is grounded in Him, is that they should believe in Him, trust Him, and follow His Word in all matters.

Faith cannot be seen, since it operates in the inner person, in the soul (Ps. 57.1). The reality of faith, working in the soul, is manifested in actions that move us toward whatever we view as true or good. Those actions are the outward *evidence* of faith at work in the inner person, shaping and directing their life in the pursuit of the hope-for thing.

The writer of Hebrews defined faith succinctly as the *assurance* (inward agreement, submission, and readiness) of things hoped for (God and His Word), and the *evidence* (outward action) of things not seen (God and His Word). The *action* of faith is visible, but *faith itself* operates in the realm of unseen things (Heb. 11.1).

Only faith *in God and His Word* results in a full, true, and good life. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11.6). But with faith, and living by faith, we may realize many important benefits. I will mention four.

Faith connects with God

First, and most importantly, faith allows us to engage with God, to hear His voice, understand His will, draw near to Him in His holiness, and know the joy, peace, and power of His presence. In faith, Abram left his home in Ur and relocated to the land of Canaan, where he built altars to the Lord; and the Lord met with him there (Gen 12.1-7). In faith, Moses drew near to the bush that burned without being consumed, and by faith he remained there to commune with God (Ex. 3). In faith, the priests of Israel submitted to God's Word, and the people to the priests, that they might maintain communion with Him and overcome the separation caused by their sins.

Whoever would come near to God, to know Him, hear His Word, learn His will, and enjoy His fellowship, must believe that He exists, and that He will bless and reward those who diligently seek Him according to His Word. Faith, operating in the soul, leads us to *agree* with God and His Word, to *submit* ourselves to Him with all our mind and heart and conscience, and to *make ready* our response as God and His Word require – whether to move to a new land, take off our sandals and draw near, offer worship to God – to follow His Word in all our ways. We connect with God, commune with Him, and know the power and joy of His presence, only as we believe in Him and His Word, beginning in our soul and obeying in our lives.

Faith enables obedience

Thus, faith enables obedience to God, the effect of which is to enhance our experience of God and of the blessings He promises to all who seek Him in faith.

We do what God commands because we agree with Him, submit to Him, and prepare ourselves in all our soul to do what He requires – in short, we *love* Him. Being assured that He is God and His Word is reliable and true, we set our souls in faith to obey, and our souls move us to whatever words or deeds God is pleased to require. Thus obeying God, we experience the promise of His Word and know His presence with us. And because we obey from the depths of our being, we *delight* to do the will of God (Ps. 40.8). We do not regard obedience an onerous thing, nor merely a duty; we delight in obedience, because obedience brings us ever more deeply into the life of God and His Word.

Faith lays bold on the promises of God

Accordingly, faith is the key to obtaining the precious and very great promises of God. Noah believed God and obeyed His will, and he realized the salvation God promised through the flood.

Abram, in faith, obeyed God at various stages in their relationship, and God granted more of His promises to the patriarch. He gave him the land of Canaan as Abram in faith moved there. He gave him a son as he in faith obeyed and went in to his wife. He gave him many offspring, and made them a blessing to the world of their day, because Abraham lived in faith before God.

As the people of Israel obeyed God in the first Passover, they received the deliverance God has promised them, and became a people holy unto the Lord. God held out the promise of a land of abundance to His people, and while the first generation failed in believing God, the generation that succeeded them believed, obeyed, entered the land, and gained it as their possession, just as God had promised.

Faith results in righteousness

Finally, obedience in faith conforms us increasingly to the righteousness of God, which He intended for us when He made us in His image.

Only God can declare someone righteous. Righteousness – life that agrees entirely with the being, attributes, and will of God – is not something sinful people can attain on their own. God must declare them to be righteous, which He does as they relate to Him in faith. This does not *make* them righteous, for only God is righteous; but it *accounts* them as righteous *in the sight of God*; and this, in turn, creates in their soul a desire to increase in the life of righteousness as God enables and guides.

Everyone lives by faith, according to their view of what constitutes the good life. The Christian knows that the good life is only to be found in God, and so, following the example of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all the faithful people of God's Word, we strive to increase in faith by drawing near to God and His Word, readying ourselves according to whatever He requires, that we might increase in the life of faith and in God both now and forever.

Questions for reflection

1. Living by faith in *something* is inescapable. Explain.
2. Faith has both an inward and an outward facet. Why is faith incomplete unless both of these are present?
3. How would you encourage a new believer to seek to increase in faith?

Next steps – Preparation: Paul wrote that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14.23). What can you do to make sure faith is operating in every aspect of your daily life?

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Every worldview consists of many unseen things. Such as?
2. Why is it important that we understand the unseen things of the Christian worldview?
3. How do these various unseen things affect our daily lives?
4. How does faith work to enable us to realize the promise of the Christian worldview?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.