**Worldviews:**

What is a Worldview and why does it matter?

A "worldview" is a way of thinking about truth and reality. It sums up the basic conclusions about life and meaning that a person figures out and lives by, either consciously or unconsciously. James Sire, in The Universe Next Door, gives the following definition of "worldview":

*A world view is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world.*

Sire suggests the following seven questions we can ask ourselves in determining our own particular worldview. In summary, they are as follows:

1. **What is prime reality - the really real?**
To this we might answer: God, the gods, or the material universe.
2. **What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?**
Do we see the world as created or autonomous, as chaotic or orderly, as matter or spirit? Do we emphasise our subjective, personal relationship to the world or its objectivity apart from us?
3. **What is a human being?**
Are we highly complex machines, sleeping gods, people made in the image of God, or "naked apes"?
4. **What happens to a person at death?**
Is it personal extinction, transformation to a higher state, or departure to a shadowy existence on "the other side"?
5. **Why is it possible to know anything at all?**
Sample answers include the idea that we are made in the image of an all-knowing God or that consciousness and intelligence have developed under the pressures of survival in a long process of evolution.
6. **How do we know what is right and wrong?**
Is it because we are made in the image of God whose character is good? Are right and wrong determined by human choice alone? Or have the notions simply developed under the pressures of cultural and physical survival?
7. **What is the meaning of human history?**
Is it to realize the purposes of God or the gods, to make a paradise on earth, to prepare people for a life in community with a loving and holy God, or something else?

With these questions in mind, let's look at four major worldviews. The following summaries are extremely brief. We could find variations on each of them. Additionally, some people pick bits that appeal to them from two or more of these worldviews and end up with a hybrid of beliefs, but this is usually the result of not thinking deeply enough about the issues.

**Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is the term used by sociologists and others to describe a way of thinking that has become very pervasive in the Western world over the last generation. Its origins are found in the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx and Freud.

**Reality**: We all create our own reality. God tends to be ignored. Should he (she, it?) exist, he certainly has nothing to say about what we should believe or how we should behave.

**How we know truth**: There is no absolute truth. As Wheaten College professor Roger Lundin explains in The Culture of Interpretation, in postmodernism "all principles are preferences - and only preferences." Postmodernism is distrustful of all authority. It often recasts the Enlightenment's sacred cows of reason and science as tools of oppression. Feminist scholar Sandra Harding complains that science embodies a male-centered view that is "culturally coercive.”

Emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection, magic, myth, and mystical experience are now center stage. "I know" has been replaced by "I feel." There is a blurring of the difference between ourselves and the real world out there.

**Religion:** Postmodernism does not rule out religion. However, religion is cafeteria style. You choose what you like from what is spread in front of you, and put a meal together that suits your taste. There are strong links with paganism.

**Morality:** All moral values are relative. Each person or culture develops their own moral values. The important question is not "Is it right?" but "What will it do for me?"

**Tolerance:** Tolerance of other views is one of the pillars of postmodernism. However, there is one group of people to whom this tolerance is not extended, those who believe truth to be important! This intolerance is especially directed to those who think others might be wrong. Postmodern analyst Frederick Turner, for instance, in *The Future of the Gods: Notes Towards a Postmodern Religion*, calls for tolerance and syncretism (mixing different religions together). Yet, in the same article he calls evangelical Christianity a "junk religion."

**Individualism**: There is a strong emphasis on individualism. In the US court case Planned Parenthood v. Casey, in justifying the abortion license, the court declared that it is up to each individual to determine "the concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

**History:** There is much rewriting of history. What really happened is either unknowable or unimportant. A sad symptom of this is seen in a survey indicating that 33% of Americans subscribed to the view that the Holocaust, the killing of six million Jews by the Nazis during World War II, may never have happened.

**Hinduisim, Buddhism and New Age thinking**

It is simplistic to lump Hinduism and Buddhism together, but they do have certain basic beliefs in common. New Age thinking tends to be adapt these eastern beliefs into western culture.

**Reality:** Everything is God. We all share the same essence or "stuff" of reality, which is spirit (Hinduism - the Brahma; Buddhism - Nirvana). This philosophy of the unity of all things is called Monism. The basic philosophy of New Age thinking is summed up in three pithy sayings: "All is God", "All is one" and "All is well". The New Age concept of God is impersonal, usually described as Force, Energy, Essence, Consciousness, Vibration, Principle, or Being.

**Matter:** This material world is unreal, a sort of fantasy or dream of some kind. The "realized soul" understands that this world means nothing and is of no value. Ultimately, salvation consists in escaping from matter. New Agers tend to put similar value on this world.

**Humans:** We are one with God. Our unity with all reality is emphasized. Individual personality is underplayed.

**Meaning:** Meaning in life comes through realizing who we are in our oneness with the divine spirit. There are no criteria for judging true from false religious experience. "I believe" tends to become "I feel."

**How we know truth:** Our significant learning comes from withdrawal from the world, looking within, getting in touch with our real selves, the divine within. Hinduism, Buddhism and New Age share a distrust of reason. In Hindusim and Buddhism the Ultimate is unknown and unknowable. It is neti neti, not this, not that'.

**Morality:** Sin is merely ignorance of the true nature of reality. We need enlightenment, not repentance. Suffering, rather than evil, is seen as our major problem and much of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy is a response to this. For some, there is no objective standard of right and wrong. As one spiritual sage from India put it, "It's not a question of whether you are good or bad...good and bad are relative. They are two sides of one coin, part of the same whole." In a similar vein, Carl Frederick wrote in *Playing the Game the New Way*, "You are the supreme being...there isn't any right or wrong." If it feels good, do it.

**Death:** We die only to be reborn in a continuous cycle of rebirth - reincarnation. In our next life we will endure the consequences of our behavior in this one - the Eastern doctrine of Karma. If we succeed in progressing in the steps of enlightenment we will eventually escape this cycle into Nirvana where individual personality will be absorbed into complete oneness with Ultimate Reality, like a wave being absorbed back into the ocean. Much of Buddhism denies the personal nature of God. New Age thinkers tend to be a little more optimistic about our continuous advance in this process than do Hindus and Buddhists.

**History**: Because we are caught up in this constant cycle of rebirth, history has little meaning. Eastern religion tends not to understand the world in terms of purpose. As someone has said, there is "movement and change without involving the idea of purpose."

**There is no God - or gods. Atheistic materialism**

**Reality:** This material universe is what is really real. As Carl Sagan, astrophysicist and popularizer of science puts it, "The cosmos is all that is or all that ever will be." The present scientific view of how the universe came into being, now taught in major universities worldwide, is that it all came into existence with a "big bang" some billions of years ago. The atheist would say this was initiated by some physical process as yet unknown.

**Humans**: Human consciousness and intelligence developed from chemicals by a long process of chance evolution. Personality developed from impersonal hydrogen atoms. "God is the DNA code," says Timothy Leary. We are all the products of matter, time and chance alone.

**How we know truth**: Knowledge is the result of physical processes in our brains. A problem here was well expressed by Professor Haldane as follows: "If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true...and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms." If my self-awareness, intelligence and ability to make choices is something more than just the movement of atoms in my brain, then, according to the materialist view, this self-awareness has somehow come about only as the result of physical processes.

**Meaning:** As there is no intelligent being who planned it all, life only has what meaning we humans choose to give it. Some would give it no meaning. Samuel Beckett's play *Breath* is a 35-second play that has no human actors. The props are a pile of rubbish on the stage, lit by a light which begins to dim, brightens (but never fully) and then recedes to dimness. There are no words, only a "recorded" cry opening the play, an inhaled breath, an exhaled breath and an identical "recorded" cry closing the play. For Beckett life is such a "breath."

**Death:** Death is the end of our personal existence. "Human destiny," Ernest Nagel confesses in *Naturalism Reconsidered*, "[is] an episode between two oblivions."

**Morality and values:** Right and wrong are merely what we decide for ourselves as humans, either individually or in groups. Usually it is the majority decision that wins the day.

**History**: History has no ultimate purpose. We have to make the most of what we have got. In the end, this planet will certainly burn up or freeze and that will be the end of everything.

**Christianity/Biblical**

**Reality:** There is one God of infinite wisdom, holiness and power, who has existed eternally. God is personal and exists within himself as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit that have always existed in a love relationship.\*

**Matter:** The universe is the creation of this God and is dependent on him for its existence. It had a beginning and, in its present form, will have an end. Matter is real and good. God himself shared in created human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Though God maintains the created universe, he is distinct from it. He himself is beyond space and time.

**Humans:** God has created humans "in his own likeness" with self-consciousness, freedom to make choices, moral accountability, intelligence, and spiritual qualities that enable us to relate personally to him. His desire is that we should enter into the loving relationships that already exist within the persons of the divine Trinity, and enjoy fellowship with him, both in this life and through eternity. We have messed things up by our waywardness, but he has acted in Jesus Christ to restore that fellowship. More of that later.

**Death:** We exist beyond death, either in a relationship with God or without him, depending on choices we have made in this life. Because the material creation matters to God, our bodies will be resurrected at Christ's Second Coming, though in a transformed state similar to Christ's resurrected body.

**How do we know truth?:** God has given us intelligence which he expects us to use, whether in our understanding of the universe or our knowledge of him. However, our moral perversity affects our ability to think clearly, especially when it comes to truth about spiritual matters. Truth about God, the meaning of life and death, and such matters, come to us by revelation. In other words, God reveals this truth to those humble enough to receive it.

**Morality:** Because God is perfectly good, he created humans with the same qualities of moral goodness. However, humans have misused the freedom given them, and our moral natures have become warped. Our goodness is tainted with "sin" and this affects our relationship with God, whose justice demands the condemnation of evil.

**History:** God makes his purposes known in history. It is "his story". He has made himself known by his actions in history and by revealing himself to chosen individuals, and particularly by entering the world in the person of Jesus Christ. History had a beginning and will culminate in the return of Jesus Christ, whom he has appointed as judge of the human race. God will ultimately create "a new heavens and a new earth" in which his people will live eternally in a loving and joyful relationship with him.

**Apologetics**

A Christian worldview of all issues based on the Bible.

The Bible tells us to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that is in us. It also says that we are to give these answers with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

The “hope that is in us” should govern our positions on everything we have authority over.

Therefore, as elected officials, you should be prepared to give an answer on every topic that you will be able to influence.

Overview of major apologetics topics for elected officials:

* Truth: What is truth? Unless you can answer this question confidently and comfortably, you won’t be able to address any of the others.
* Slavery/Racism
* Abortion
* Euthanasia
* Marriage
* Gambling
* Evolution
* Taxation
* Immigration
* Public Education
* Capital Punishment
* Free Market

With regard to political issues - there are a number of issues, addressed in the Bible, on which Christians do not agree. The application is seen differently by groups professing the same love for God and for His Word. Let’s not allow our differences to divide us as we seek the Lord.

Examples: Capital Punishment, Immigration, Zoning, Taxes, etc,