

Biblical Worldview Scope for *History of America, 5th ed.*

Introduction: This document is an attempt to answer (in the form of a scope) the question, “What must a fifth-grade student comprehend and value in order to understand American history from a biblical worldview?” It provides five worldview themes that we believe are essential for students to understand and internalize. These themes are developed within a Creation, Fall, and Redemption paradigm.

Under the heading of Creation, students will investigate the way God intended for the universe to operate through creational norms. These norms give structure to each theme by describing how life would have operated had sin not entered the world. Creational norms are discerned by applying natural and special revelation.

The Fall heading considers how creational norms related to each theme have been twisted by sinful people in a fallen world. This entails both intentional human efforts and the effects of sin’s curse on all of nature. These distortions of the Fall hinder human thriving.

Lastly, the Redemption heading explores how to restore creational norms within the context of a fallen world. It provides a Christian response to the effects of sin in light of God’s original design and encourages believers to live in ways that honor God.

Throughout the course, students will *recall* and *explain* creational norms connected to these themes. As these themes recur, students will begin to *evaluate* ideas according to the standard of God’s Word, often exposing the influence of sin. Finally, they will *formulate* a Christian understanding of these subjects and *apply* what they have learned to real-life situations.

Freedom

Creation

Freedom is the power to act according to one’s will. God granted this power to humans for the purpose of fulfilling His commands. Such freedom equipped people to live well, to love God and others (Mark 12:30–31), and to have dominion over the earth (Gen.1:28). Even a perfect world brought challenges, and freedom provided the flexibility to apply wisdom as circumstances entailed. In every decision, man was free to determine and enact the best course of action.

But such power also enables bad decisions. For this reason, God gave moral guidelines for how freedom is used through His commands. The exercise of freedom is only authorized by the Creator when used to accomplish His commands and purpose. Thus, Adam and Eve were free to eat from almost any tree in the Garden, but one was off-limits because it would corrupt them and hinder their ability to obey God (Gen. 2:16–17). And though man and woman were commanded to fill the earth and multiply, God also instituted marriage to restrict that freedom in a healthy way (Gen. 2:24).

The moral guidance of God provides freedom with necessary oversight. Authorities, including governments, exist to preserve freedom within this moral framework (Rom. 13:3–4).

Fall

Adam and Eve had the power to eat the forbidden fruit, but not the authority to do so. They were free to disobey, albeit at great consequence. Ultimately, they abused their freedom by disobeying God, using their power in

opposition to Him and His purposes. Ever since, people have likewise unjustly marshaled their freedom against the One who gave it to them. They ignore His moral authority and consider everything in their power a right. Freedom is used to pursue their own ends, rejecting the purpose of God. People rebel against all forms of authority to acquire even greater freedom, not realizing that freedom without moral barriers is bondage (2 Pet. 2:19). In their zeal for being free, they reject even reality itself (e.g., the LGBT movement, which is centered on overcoming the limitations of biology and nature). Like the tower of Babel, this twists the Creation Mandate into a defense of the indefensible, a prideful attempt to dethrone God.

On the other extreme, individuals or groups sometimes deprive others of biblically endorsed freedoms. Theft, slavery, and tyranny are all manifestations of power being abused to accomplish injustice. Often, this enhances the freedom of one by reducing the freedom of another.

Redemption

After exercising freedom to great excess, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes recognizes his error and concludes: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13). Freedom is a means toward this end, not an end in itself. Followers of Christ, as those who have been set free by the truth in Christ (John 8:32), recognize that God has provided gracious guidance and moral limits on freedom in nature and in His Word. Yet His commands are not burdensome. On the contrary, they are rather freeing in their simplicity: Love God and love others (Matt. 22:37–40).

In submission to God, Christians limit the exercise of their freedom accordingly, and by demonstrating meekness and wisdom they glorify Him and benefit themselves. Ultimately, they will find that God’s boundaries protect them and make them the freest of all, like livestock safe within the confines of a pasture or a train swiftly traveling down its track. Believers should not emphasize their rights but be willing to forgo freedoms out of love for God and neighbor (Rom. 14). “Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Gal. 5:13–14).

Governments also have a responsibility to uphold this understanding of freedom. They must do so by striking a balance, curtailing immoral freedoms while protecting as many other freedoms as possible. This avoids the dangers of libertarianism and authoritarianism and restricts the ability of the one or the many to deprive others of freedom.

Example Objectives

- 77.4 Analyze the need for law, order, and the gospel in the Wild West.
- 111.3 Evaluate the impact of entertainment on American moral standards in the 1920s.
- 41.4 Propose ways people can show love by not always insisting on freedoms.

Individuality

Creation

The freedom God provides to all people demonstrates the significance of the individual. Each person is free to make his or her own decisions and is accountable to God for those choices, good or bad (Ezek. 18, 2 Cor. 5:10). Salvation requires personal repentance and submission (Acts 2:38). God also calls individuals to fulfill specific tasks (Jer. 1:5). Additionally, the variety of personalities, physical features, and circumstances among people emphasizes the importance of the individual. Each one is a unique image-bearer of God.

At the same time, Scripture also emphasizes relationships and community. Adam could not exercise dominion over the earth by himself. It was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18) so God created a helper for him, instituting marriage. The couple was commanded to fill the earth, instituting the family. And as mankind grew, it would require the institution of government as well. Some aspects of community are assigned (such as family, home-town, gender group, and nationality), but others are based on individual choice (e.g., friends, spouse, workplace,

or church). Each individual is partly defined by the communities to which he belongs, yet his individuality is not lost or minimized. Relationships, chosen or not, come with certain expectations, responsibilities, and privileges. God expects individuals to properly balance these ideas, and governments should work toward fostering this same balance.

Fall

Individuals were created to submit to God, yet the Serpent convinced Adam and Eve to put their individual desires above their responsibilities to God and each other (Gen. 3:6), just as the Serpent had done in his rebellion against God. God confronts each guilty individual to restore order, but the Serpent does not answer, and Adam and Eve cast blame rather than taking responsibility. All three are suggesting that the individual should have total autonomy without any accountability. In doing so, they are assuming the place of God.

People continue to resist God and the roles into which He has placed them. They rail against all that God has appointed for them, including His law and community obligations. They resist God-given authorities as a challenge to their individual rights and an unfair restriction on their personal preferences, which trump all else. Even among the relationships that they have chosen, they emphasize their rights and ignore their responsibilities.

America, like all Western nations, has tended to be too individualistic, idolizing the individual and his or her “rights,” even when those “rights” are detrimental to others and an affront to God. Governments are designed to curtail evil, but the US has instead often defended evil as personal prerogative. Ironically, contemporary politics are moving more to the opposite extreme, oppressing individuals and making them slaves to the group. Minority or unpopular views are suppressed and criminalized because the majority demands it. Such tyranny dishonors God’s image-bearers and usurps His authority over what does not rightly belong to the state.

Redemption

Since all communities and cultures are plagued by sin, there are no perfect civic examples from which to learn a proper balance of individual privilege and responsibility. However, God’s Word provides a great deal of instruction on this topic for His church. Each Christian is compared to a part of the human body, distinct and fulfilling a vital role, yet interdependent with others and primarily focused on the benefit of the whole (1 Cor. 12:12–27).

Through repentance and faith in Christ, individuals become a part of God’s church. The most significant aspect of their identity is that they are now “in Christ.” Belonging to this community comes with incredible privileges like being a child of God, being forgiven of sin, and having a new family throughout the world (Matt. 10:29–30). Yet the biblical emphasis is on the individual’s responsibilities to the redeemed community. The church is characterized by unity and care for one another (Acts 2:44–46). Every believer is commanded to sacrifice for the benefits of others, prioritizing their good even above his own. This is in keeping with the example of Christ Himself (Phil. 2:3–8). With this understanding in mind, followers of Christ can selflessly demonstrate love in other community and civic settings, not insisting on their own way but graciously doing good. They must reject both the call of radical self-expression and the temptation of personal benefit at the expense of others.

Example Objectives

- 2.2 Explain how the people worked together to share abilities and resources.
- 106.1 Assess the benefits and harms of war promotion and propaganda.
- 172–73.4 Propose a biblically balanced response to a pandemic.

Equality

Creation

Equality before God is established the very first time people are mentioned in His Word. Male and female are both made in His image (Gen. 1:26–27). And because all people are descendants of Adam and Eve, all people bear that divine image (Luke 3:38). God rewards righteousness and punishes sin, but He shows no favoritism related to inherent qualities (Rom. 2:11).

At the same time, God has provided authority structures in creation to maintain order and to supply benefit. Within a human context, those under authority must submit to the authority that has been established by God, despite being intrinsically equal. Likewise, those afforded authority must use it in a way that respects their equal standing before God (Eph. 6:9) and stays within the bounds established by God. Such authority and submission will bring human flourishing if practiced well. Husbands are commanded to lovingly lead their wives, who are to submit to them (Eph. 5:22–33). Fathers are to train and teach their children, who must submit to their parents (Eph. 6:1–4). Governments are to pursue peace, justice, and righteousness, encouraging good and punishing evil as their citizens dutifully meet state obligations (Isa. 9:7, Rom. 13:1–7, 1 Pet. 2:13–17). And pastors are to lead their churches well, with congregants submitting to their leadership (Heb. 13:17).

Fall

Adam and Eve's disobedience was motivated by a desire for equality with their Creator. They were promised that eating the forbidden fruit would make them like God (Gen. 3:5). In questioning God's commands, they considered the Serpent to be God's equal in wisdom. They failed to recognize that insisting on or granting equality where God has not ordained it only brings chaos and destruction.

This same antiauthoritarian mindset continues to wreak havoc today. Those who insist on their equality refuse to submit to rules or standards beyond their own. This rejection of human authority tends to end in the rejection of God's authority as well, only leading to further ruin (e.g., Num. 16). Feminism, lawlessness, and church division are a few of these practices that have a track record of devastation.

Man's sin nature has also birthed the injustice of rejecting equality where it has been instituted by God. Throughout history, individuals have been treated as less than human in an attempt to excuse wicked behavior toward them. Distinctions have been made based on nationality, race, sex, and religion, among many other factors. Such inequality has led to wars, slavery, tyranny, genocide, and many more atrocities.

Redemption

Like many other concepts, fallen minds have distorted the idea of equality to two unhealthy extremes. A believer's response should be a correction that takes the best of both sides and brings them together in a healthy unity. Christians must affirm in word and in deed the reality of human equality before God while also supporting the specific authority structures that God has created. As God's people willingly accept their rightful positions under God-given authority and utilize any legitimate authority God has given to them in love, they will discover mutual benefit and find common purpose. They will coalesce like a well-organized army and generally bring success to their kingdom mission (Phil. 1:27), achieving healthy relationships with both God and man.

Example Objectives

- 7.3 Analyze the communal nature of the Creek culture.
- 84.2 Evaluate the problems resulting from Social Darwinism.
- 13.4 Relate the gospel to rightly valuing people of all cultures.

Growth

Creation

God placed the first man and woman in a garden, but this was not to be their permanent state. Obedience to His command of multiplying and exercising dominion over the whole earth (Gen 1:28) would eventually lead to enlarging the garden or departing from it to accommodate population growth. Even without the Fall, new land would need to be tamed and new challenges overcome. Man would need to engineer inventions like wheels and sails, develop technologies like metallurgy and bridgebuilding, innovate writing and currency, and discern efficient and sustainable forms of agriculture and animal husbandry (some of these appear in Gen. 4:20–22). The goal of such practices should be further expansion of the human race and mutual benefit for people in a way that also demonstrates good stewardship over God’s world. Such development also assumes the rise of different cultures, languages, and nations. These nations would require governments to foster good relationships among individuals and other outside groups to safeguard justice and mutually beneficial growth.

Fall

God cursed the ground in response to Adam’s sin, limiting its fruitfulness. This brought resource scarcity and competition among people desperate to access these resources. Greed and selfishness have become the norm for everything from individual to international relations. Instead of innovating to make the most of what is currently available or acting as peacekeepers, governments unjustly use war and coercion to seize land, people, and other resources.

Many also unjustly disregard their responsibility as stewards of nature and show little concern for the long-term consequences of their choices on the well-being of generations yet unborn. Others react to this behavior by advocating for detrimental limitations on humans for the benefit of nature, whether of resource use or total population. All of these policies and actions lead to poverty, suffering, and death. Progressivism is also recklessly employed, giving the illusion of progress without accomplishing any meaningful goals.

Redemption

Learning from past injustices, Christians must champion a biblical perspective on growth, one that respects the freedom, individuality, and equality of other people and pursues a form of growth that attempts to help all parties. It should accomplish this through peaceful relations that reject war as a tool for expanding territory, power, or wealth. Technological innovation must seek to provide greater efficiency from existing resources. Land use should be driven by conservation rather than environmentalism or recklessness. Wise policies have historically led to better living conditions for growing populations without disadvantaging others. Nevertheless, the Curse means that there will still be limited resources, and often there will be less than everyone needs to live comfortably. Christians must learn to be content with less than they would prefer, as well as content to leave others with abundance rather than attempting to seize it by force.

Example Objectives

- 11.3 Describe technological developments and inventions that shaped exploration.
- 53.5 Critique the Indian removal policy.
- 98.4 Apply lessons learned from the Progressive Era to current events.

Religion

Creation

Man was made to relate to God through worship, a humble response of submission and praise to Him. The Creator designed people with an innate compulsion to worship Him and has provided clear expectations for how this should be done through both natural and special revelation. God has revealed Himself in creation itself (Rom 1:20–21, Ps. 19:1–6) and has also done so more precisely in His Word.

Mankind's worshiping nature manifests itself in the development of religions. Every culture is religious, although religion may take many forms. Regardless of the form it takes, religion informs the values of culture. In that sense, religious views underly and influence the rest of society and the exercise of government even when otherwise invisible. Every government operates from some religious perspective.

Fall

Despite their knowledge of the truth about God in nature and in Scripture, fallen people refuse to worship God. Yet their need to worship remains, and they reroute it to man-made objects of worship (Romans 1:18–32). The resulting religions call evil good and serve man rather than the Creator.

Throughout history, many cultures have created new religions or modified existing ones to legitimize their actions and values. For these cultures, religion became a tool to benefit themselves rather than being a way to honor God. This adulteration is called civil religion. American civil religion borrows its language, legitimacy, and appeal from biblical Christianity but removes its defining feature, Christ. At the very least, He is sidelined for more inclusive ideas and themes. The resulting religion is a wide net of semi-pluralism that opens the door for secularism. Most doctrinal views, even heresies, are accepted as forms of American Christianity.

In modern history, the most common religion, secularism, masquerades as no religion at all. Secularism marginalizes religious practice and relegates it to the private sphere, making it inconsequential to most of life. This means the content of religious practice is irrelevant and allows for any amalgam of beliefs. Each person can have his own custom religion without bothering anyone else. This allows a government to embrace religious pluralism while minimizing the division it stirs among citizens. In defense of this peace, some governments go so far as to regulate religious group activity and even what religious groups teach and officially believe.

Redemption

The church has an important role to play in civic life. Christians must respond to the marginalizing influence of secularism by discerning how to reinsert their faith into the public discussion. They must challenge the many un-biblical versions of Christianity that mislead the lost and preach falsehood. Biblical fidelity is of the utmost importance for those who desire to follow Christ. Believers should be willing to sacrifice to share a biblical perspective out of love for others, knowing that it is in their best interest to hear it. People face eternal condemnation for their willful rebellion against God, yet He offers forgiveness to all who will receive it through the death and resurrection of Christ. Believers must spread this message of hope in their words and deeds.

Example Objectives

- 22.2 Compare and contrast biblical Christianity with Quaker beliefs.
- 88.3 Evaluate the social gospel movement.
- 108.4 Demonstrate the Bible's ability to provide hope in a difficult time.