



EDITORIAL

# What Shapes Our Views

BY **GREG PARSONS**

**Greg Parsons** has been on the staff of Frontier Ventures (formerly USCWM) since 1982, and currently serves as Director of Global Connections. He and his wife Kathleen have two children and three grandchildren.

**A**s we seek to extend God's fame among the nations, we must seriously consider (1) what has shaped *us*, (2) how that informs how we interpret the Scriptures and (3) how we share truth with others.

I was raised in a family defined as "traditional" in the sense that my mother and father were both in the home, along with two brothers and one sister. We all shaped each other. We grew up going to church—I don't remember a time that I didn't. That shaped my views of everything (almost). Growing up in the suburbs of Silicon Valley, there were many of my friends who almost never darkened the doors of a church, and probably thought I was strange.

When I was entering high school, my family switched to a new church that was just starting. It emphasized Bible teaching, fellowship and accountability. I was mentored and drawn into ministry—from service to discipling and teaching, learning, applying and, hopefully, growing more. I was also being increasingly drawn into full-time ministry. I began to consider seminary as a way to learn more about studying and understanding the Word in depth. For me, it led me on a path of continual learning.

I am sure I'm missing many things still. As I learn, I increasingly see how much there is to learn. More often now, I seek the Spirit to help me to see myself and the Word more clearly. And there are things to "unlearn!"

All that to say that when we come to the Bible, we have been (and are) influenced by many *people*—from family to friends to mentors as well as many *experiences*. Those who’ve experienced other languages and cultures have broader experiences.

Naturally, that worldview shapes our *paradigm* for how we understand the Scriptures and what we expect and believe the Bible to teach. Much of the time, we don’t even think about either our worldview or the paradigm with which we come to the Bible. Perhaps an illustration or two will help.

Ralph Winter used to teach how a central underlying theme of the Scriptures is that we are here to take God’s message to all peoples. He would say that missions was not based *on* the Bible, but that the missions was the basis *of* the Bible. He would illustrate how an average Western evangelical might come to the Bible like a refrigerator. When we read it, we are looking to be fed (a good thing) perhaps a snack. On Sunday, the pastor takes something from a different shelf of the fridge (Bible), a Sunday School teacher another, and so on.

That approach, if overstated, can keep us from seeing the whole story and purpose of the Bible. And, means we come with a self-centered perspective, always looking for something for *us* because we see the Bible as mainly meeting *our* needs. At other times, we come to the Bible as a sort of theological dictionary or a reference book of moral principles.<sup>1</sup> It’s an answer book.

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The amazing thing about the Bible is that it is full of all kinds of things and you can get moral direction from it. It is full of theology (a word which means the “study of God”). But it is not mainly a reference or answer book. When we come to it for our needs, we also tend to use

it as a way to prove we are right and other views are wrong. We use it to confirm our bias. That can happen both inside and outside the Church (with people from other religious traditions).

Chris Tomlin’s popular song “Our God” has biblical truth in it: that there is none like Him ... none is greater, stronger, higher than any other.... which is all true. But the danger is that as believers, we can sound like a child saying, “my daddy is bigger or stronger than your daddy.” Or my “religion” is better or right, and yours is all wrong.

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Certainly God is supreme and powerful beyond our imaginations and there are passages in the Scripture that describe that. But notice that when God tells us *clearly* what He is like—what His name means—He doesn’t mention power or position. He does not need to do so. Instead, in Exodus 34:6-7 (the most quoted passage within the whole Bible) He uses words and phrases like:

“...merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...” (ESV)

And right after God proclaims His love and mercy and grace and forgiveness to an audience of *one*—Moses bows in worship!

As we worship Him let’s present ourselves as learners, seeking to spread the name of a loving and gracious God. 

<sup>1</sup> Hear more on this in this episode of the Bible Project Podcast: <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/how-do-you-read-bible/>