

Is the Church Ready to Engage the World for Christ?

Christ's last commandment was to engage the world with the gospel. But today's church has often embraced postmodern attitudes that reject absolute truth, absolute values, and even the Bible's insistence that Jesus is the only way to God. We are hardly ready to engage the world anymore.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



The Mission of the Church

The church is called to engage the world for Christ. Jesus commanded us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you . . .”

Many churches and Christian organizations are doing a wonderful job in fulfilling this call. However, it appears that the majority of the church has responded in one of two ways. Some churches have chosen to retreat and protect themselves from the world by secluding themselves in their own isolated communities. We see huddles of Christian communities with their own sports leagues, schools, clubs, etc. There is nothing wrong with Christian programs, but if it is created with an isolationist mentality, we create a church that is withdrawn from the world, irrelevant, and unable to relate to the unbelieving world.

I saw a display of this at a funeral once. As an invited guest not knowing anyone, I sat with the non-believers in the audience and observed how the Christians at the funeral interacted with the non-believers. The pastor preached a message using terminology foreign to the non-Christian. After

the funeral, at the lunch reception, I saw the Christians huddled together speaking “Christianese”—a language that sounded totally foreign. What a wasted opportunity! This moment was a small display of the danger that isolating ourselves from the world creates: Christians unable to relate with the lost world.

Another response has been that, instead of transforming the world, many churches have been transformed by the world. The popular thinking of the culture has dismantled the foundational truths upon which the church once stood. Major denominations are now in a battle or have given up their position on key tenets regarding truth, moral absolutes, and religious truth.

The result of these two responses has been devastating. George Barna writes, “[A]s we prepare to enter into a new century of ministry, we must address one inescapable conclusion: despite the activity and chutzpah emanating from thousands of congregations, the Church in America is losing influence and adherents faster than any other major institution in the nation.”^{1}

Charles Colson writes, “We live in a culture that is at best morally indifferent. A culture in which Judeo-Christian values are mocked and where immorality in high places is not only ignored but even rewarded in the voting booth. A culture in which violence, banality, meanness, and disintegrating personal behavior are destroying civility and endangering the very life of our communities. . . . Small wonder that many people have concluded that the ‘Culture war’ is over and we (the church) have lost.”^{2}

Let us study some of the key issues facing the church in the 21st century and see how they have affected our witness. And let’s see if we are indeed ready to engage our world.

The Church and Truth

Our current, postmodern culture adheres to the position that universal objective truth does not exist. Truth is relative to each individual and to each culture. Jim Leffel summarizes postmodern relativism this way,

Relativism says the truth isn't fixed by outside reality, but is decided by a group or individual for themselves. Truth isn't discovered but manufactured. Truth is ever changing not only in insignificant matters of taste or fashion, but in crucial matters of spirituality, morality and reality itself.{3}

Leading postmodern thinker John Caputo writes, "The cold, hermeneutic truth, is that there is no truth, no master name which holds things captive." {4} Both men summarize the postmodern belief that objective truth does not exist and therefore, we conclude that all truth claims are equal even if they are contradictory.

This understanding of truth permeates every area of our culture. Public schools, government, and the media all promote the view that 'since there are multiple descriptions of reality, no one view can be true in an ultimate sense.

A survey of the American public revealed that 66 percent agreed with the statement, "There is no such thing as absolute truth." {5} Among the youth, 70 percent believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth; two people could define "truth" in conflicting ways and both be correct." {6}

This popular notion stands in opposition to biblical teaching. Truth is rooted in God. It corresponds to the facts of reality. It is embodied in Christ and revealed in God's revelation, the Bible. Jesus states in John 14:6, "I am the way the truth and the life. . . ." God, who is truth, has revealed to us His word of the truth, the Bible. In John 17:17

Jesus prays for His disciples saying, “Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth.” Absolute truth is knowable because God has revealed it to us in the Bible. Truth is not a social construct created by a culture, nor is it relative as some postmodernists claim. It is transmitted to us by the God of truth to His creatures who are expected to conform themselves to this truth.

For two millennia the church has been the guardian of truth. However, unbridled postmodern philosophy appears to have influenced the church in a frightful way. According to the latest studies the church could be in danger of surrendering her position. According to the latest research, 53 percent of adults in church believe there is no absolute truth. Among the youth in church, research shows that 57 percent do not believe an objective standard of truth exists^{7}

Ephesians 6 exhorts us to engage in spiritual battle with the spiritual armor God provides. An essential component is the “belt of truth.” Without a clear understanding of truth, we cannot hope to successfully engage our culture for Christ. God’s truth is the foundation on which the church’s message stands.

The Church and Ethics

Most Americans reject the idea of absolute truth, so they naturally reject the idea of absolute moral truth. George Barna writes, “This transformation has done more to undermine the health and stability of American Society—and perhaps, of the world. . . .”^{8}

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer wrote,

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies (to all people), that which provides a final or ultimate standard. There must

be an absolute if there are to be morals, and there must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions.[{9}](#)

Dr. Schaeffer's conclusion is what we must inevitably come to if we hold to the belief that truth is relative. The danger of rejecting moral absolutes is that we surrender our right to judge anyone's beliefs or behaviors as right or wrong. We then arrive at the unbiblical position of tolerating all beliefs and lifestyles, whether those involve homosexuality, abortion, misogyny, or other behaviors. The Bible, then, becomes a book of suggestions on how to live and is no longer God's universal law for mankind.

Barna's survey shows that most people in our country have come to this conclusion. He records that only 25 percent of adults and 10 percent of teens believe there is absolute moral truth.[{10}](#)

The biblical position is that there are revealed moral absolutes. God, who is truth, has revealed His truth through His word, the Bible. The moral law revealed in God's word is universal. In Romans 2, God is just to judge every person according to His law. His law is given in His word and also He has placed a witness to His law in the moral conscience of men (Romans 2:14-16).

According to Barna's survey, only 49 percent of born again Christians agreed with the proposition that moral truth is absolute and 51 percent either disagreed or did not know what to think about moral truth.[{11}](#) 57 percent of Christian teens believe that when it comes to morals and ethics, truth means different things to different people; no one can be absolutely positive they have the truth.[{12}](#)

If there are no moral absolutes, we cannot clearly define sin. Teaching on holy living is lost in the absence of clear standards of morality. Without a moral foundation, churches and their members are *influenced by* the culture more than they are *influencing* the culture for Christ. That is what we are seeing in churches today. Mainline denominations are adopting the values of the culture and abandoning the biblical stand on several moral issues. Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard warns, “Once the church comes to terms with the world, Christianity is abolished.”[\[13\]](#)

The Church and Spiritual Truth

If absolute truth does not exist, then moral absolutes do not exist. The same then applies to religious truth. The religion of our culture would be syncretism. Syncretism combines complementary and often contradictory teachings from different religions to form a new system tailored to each individual’s preferences. Indeed, Barna’s research reveals that 62 percent of Americans agree that “it doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow because all faiths teach similar lessons about life.”[\[14\]](#)

Syncretism contradicts biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that the truth is found in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. In John 14:6 Jesus states, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.” The Apostles repeat this claim. In Acts 4:12 Peter states, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

The Bible teaches that the Bible itself is the source of spiritual truth and that salvation is found exclusively in Jesus. Not only does the biblical evidence argue against syncretism, logic does as well.

A brief study of the world’s religions reveals that they are

contradictory on their basic truth claims, and therefore, mutually exclusive. Ravi Zacharias writes, “Most people think all religions are essentially the same and only superficially different. Just the opposite is true.”

However, if all religions are true, all religious practices are valid and cannot be judged good or evil. Then are we to tolerate cultures that burn living widows alive at their husband’s funerals because of their religious convictions? How about religions that teach young men to execute acts of terrorism on innocent victims in the name of God? We would have to conclude that we couldn’t say such practices are right or wrong.

Postmodern ideas have made their impact on the church regarding the belief of absolutes, regarding spiritual truth, and the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ. Jesus made it clear in John 14:6 that He is the source of spiritual truth and the only way to eternal life. However, among born again Christians, 31 percent believe that if a person is good enough they can earn a place in heaven. 26 percent believe it doesn’t matter what faith you follow, because they all teach the same lessons. 24 percent believe that while He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people.[{15}](#) 30 percent believe Jesus died, but never had a physical resurrection.[{16}](#)

These surveys reveal that a growing number of Christians do not understand the basic teachings regarding the unique nature of Christ and His message. If Christianity is not true in its unique claims, the church is preaching a message of religious preference and not one of eternal truth. The power of the gospel is that spiritual truth and salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ.

The Church That Will Engage

Our postmodern culture brings some formidable challenges to the church of the 21st century. The church is struggling with

foundational issues like the nature of truth, moral absolutes, and spiritual truth. What is required of us if we are to be successful in engaging the world for Christ? It is for Christians to have a courageous faith, committed hearts, a compelling defense, and a compassionate attitude.

1 Peter 3:14-16 states, “‘Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened.’ But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

The world is often hostile to the message of Christ, especially its message of salvation found only in Jesus and its teaching on moral absolutes. That is why courageous faith that overcomes fear is essential.

Second, we are called to engage the world with committed hearts. Peter writes that instead of fear, we are to, “set apart Christ as Lord.” Courageous faith comes from a heart committed to Jesus. When Jesus is Lord of a believer’s heart, he or she responds properly in any situation. The church is the greatest witness for Christ when Jesus is Lord of every member’s life.

Third, to engage the world for Christ, we must have a compelling defense of the faith. Peter writes, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have.” We are exhorted to never be caught unprepared; never unwilling, and never timid about our response. The word “answer” in the Greek is *apologia*, which was used in connection with a formal public defense often before magistrates and in judicial courts. Every Christian is called to defend the faith.

Unfortunately, much of the church is unable to do this. A recent survey by Josh McDowell showed that 84 percent of Christian college freshmen were unable to explain why they

believed.^{17} We can't expect a skeptical world to believe our message if we can't give them a compelling reason why they should. For this reason, every Christian is called to the study of apologetics.

Fourth, we must engage with a compassionate attitude. Gentleness refers to the attitude that relies on God to change attitudes and minds. Respect is the same word used in the New Testament for reverence shown towards God. We are not to witness with an arrogant or combative demeanor, but one of gentleness and respect. Without these two qualities, it is dangerous to attempt to evangelize.

Probe Ministries is committed to equipping the church to engage their world for Christ. Probe's ministries include our Web site, books, and conferences that will equip you to engage our world with insight and integrity, providing Christians a ready answer for their faith.

Notes

1. George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1998), 1.
2. Charles Colson, *How Shall We Now Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 1999), ix-x.
3. Dennis McCallum ed., *The Death of Truth*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), "Our New Challenge: Postmodernism," by Jim Leffel, 31.
4. John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 192.
5. Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 16.
6. Barna, *Third Millenium Teens*, (Ventura, CA.: Barna Research

Group, 1999), 44.

7. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance* (Wheaton, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998) 172-173.

8. Barna, *Boiling Point*, (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 2001), 78.

9. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming Revell, 1976), 145.

10. Barna, *Boiling Point*, 78.

11. Ibid., 80.

12. McDowell and Hostetler, 21.

13. Quoted by Michael Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 37.

14. Barna, *Absolute Confusion*, (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1993), 79-80.

15. Barna, "Born Again Christians," *Barna Research Online*, 19 April 2001, 2.

16. Barna, "Americans' Bible Knowledge is in the Ballpark, But Often Off Base," *Barna Research Online*, 12 July 2000.

17. McDowell and Hostetler, 173.

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1. Barna, George. *Absolute Confusion*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993.

2. _____. *Boiling Point*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001.

3. _____. *The Second Coming of the Church*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1998.

4. _____. "Born Again Christians," *Barna Research Online*, 19

April 2001.

5. _____. "Americans' Bible Knowledge is in the Ballpark, But Often Off Base," *Barna Research Online*, 12, July 2000.

6. _____. *Third Millenium Teens*, Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 1999.

7. Caputo, John. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Indiana University Press, 1987.

8. Charles Colson. *How Shall We Now Live?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 1999.

9. Groothius, Douglas. *Truth Decay*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

10. McCallum, Dennis ed., *The Death of Truth*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996, "Our New Challenge: Postmodernism" by Jim Leffel, p. 31.

11. McDowell, Josh and Bob Hostetler. *The New Tolerance*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998.

12. McDowell, Josh and Bob Hostetler. *Right From Wrong*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994.

13. Schaeffer, Francis. *How Should We Then Live?* Old Tappan, N.J: Fleming Revell, 1976.

14. Veith, Gene Edward. *Postmodern Times*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994.

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The Need to Read: G. K. Chesterton

Continuing in '[The Need to Read](#)' series, Todd Kappelman examines the writings of G.K. Chesterton, a writer admired by both C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer.

A Christian for the Twentieth Century

This article is another installment in our continuing *Need to Read* series. The purpose of the series is to introduce people to authors they might enjoy and to offer some help by way of navigating through the themes developed in the works written by these individuals. It is regrettable that many people who enjoy C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer neglect the writings of Gilbert Keith, or G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), a man who was admired by both Lewis and Schaeffer. George Bernard Shaw called him a “colossal genius” and Pope Pius XI called him “a devoted son of the Holy Church and a gifted defender of the faith.”[\[1\]](#)

Until his death at the age of seventy-two, Chesterton was a dominant figure in England and a staunch defender of the faith, and Christian orthodoxy, as well as an enthusiastic member of the Roman Catholic church. In addition to nearly one hundred books, he wrote for over seventy-five British periodicals and fifty American publications. He wrote literary criticism, religious and philosophical argumentation, biographies, plays, poetry, nonsense verse, detective stories, novels, short stories, and economic, political, and social commentaries.[\[2\]](#)

An excellent introduction to Chesterton can be found in a book titled *Orthodoxy*, published in the United States in 1908, and affectionately dedicated to his mother. In *Orthodoxy* Chesterton gives an apologetic defense of his Christian faith.

He believed this defense was necessary to answer some of the criticism directed at his previous book, *Heretics*.[\[3\]](#)

Before Schaeffer wrote *Escape From Reason*, Chesterton titled the third chapter of *Orthodoxy* "The Suicide of Thought," a chronicle of the demise of modern man.

Chesterton believed that what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. "Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled on the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert, is exactly the part he ought to doubt³himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason."[\[4\]](#)

Chesterton believed that man's autonomy had been elevated beyond the reason of God; each individual has become his or her own master. The sages can see no answer to the problem of religion, but that is not the trouble with modern sages. Modern man, and his sages, said Chesterton, cannot even see the riddle.

Modern men, he believed, had become like small children who are so stupid that they do not even object to obvious philosophical contradictions.[\[5\]](#) Chesterton, like C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer after him, understood that religion in the twentieth century would become very philosophical even for the average man. Chesterton reminds us that Christians would be living in a time when many of their friends, family, and neighbors, as well as their co-workers and spouses, would no longer be living as though man had to be reasonable. Later Francis Schaffer would call this same cultural phenomenon the age of *non-reason*.

Chesterton was very proud of being a Roman Catholic, and frequently defended his denomination as much as he did the

faith in general. He was a Roman Catholic who was also deeply concerned about the universal church and will probably be enjoyed by most people who like C. S. Lewis and a “Mere Christianity” type of approach to the faith.

Chesterton and a Reasonable Christianity

In his book *The Everlasting Man* one can find the mature Chesterton. It was written in 1925 just three years after the Roman Catholic church had received him at the age of almost fifty. In this book Chesterton employs a style of argumentation called the *reductio ad absurdum*.^[6] He assumes some of the claims of rationalists and agnostics to show the absurdity of their point of view. He begins with a demonstration that if man is treated as a mere animal the result would not only be ridiculous, but the world would not exist in its present state. Men do not really act as though there is nothing special and significant about human beings. They act as though man is unique and that he is the most superior and crowning achievement in the known universe.

In a section titled “The Riddles of the Gospel” Chesterton attempts to show what it would be like if an individual were to approach the Gospels and really confront the Christ of history who is presented there. He would not find a Christ who looks like other moral teachers. The Christ presented in the New Testament is not dull or insipid, He is dynamic and unparalleled in history. The Christ of the Gospels is full of perplexities and paradoxes.

The *freethinker* and many nonbelievers, said Chesterton, object to the apparent contradictions found in the Bible, especially as it pertains to Christ. Jesus admonished His followers to turn the other cheek and take no thought for tomorrow. However, He did not turn the other cheek with respect to the money changers in the Temple and was constantly warning people to prepare for the future. Likewise, Christ’s view of the marriage bond is unique and unparalleled in history. Jews,

Romans, and Greeks did not believe or even understand enough to disbelieve the mystical idea that the man and the woman had become one sacramental substance in the matrimonial union.[{7}](#) Christ's view of marriage is neither a product of His culture or even a logical development from the time period. It is an utterly strange and wonderful teaching which bears the stigma of being from another world.

Before C. S. Lewis had formulated his observations that Christ is either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord, Chesterton had laid out the very same problem. The Christ of the New Testament, said Chesterton, is not a mere mythical figure. He cannot be merely another ethical teacher or even a good man; these options are not open to anyone who would honestly consider the Christ who is encountered in the Scriptures. The question remains, Who is Christ?

In *The Everlasting Man* Chesterton maintains that each of the aforementioned explanations are singularly inadequate. The belief that Christ was a delusional lunatic, or even a good teacher, suggests something of the mystery which they miss.[{8}](#) There must be something to a person who is so mysterious and confusing that he has inspired as much controversy as Christ.

Christ is who He said He was and is infinitely more mysterious than the finite human mind can fully comprehend. In his writings G. K. Chesterton demonstrates that he is a Christian writer who possessed those rare and necessary gifts which allow difficult theological and philosophical problems to be understood and discussed by the average man.

Chesterton's Reflections on America

Chesterton's writings cover theological, philosophical, social, political, and economic trends simultaneously with particular attention to a Christian worldview. In the two works *What I Saw In America* and *Sidelights*, Chesterton offers the reader his reflections on America during the early part of

the twentieth century.

On January 10, 1921 Chesterton and his wife Frances began a three month tour of America. Their first stop was in New York City. Here Chesterton examined the lights of Broadway and proclaimed: "What a glorious garden of wonders this would be to anyone who was lucky enough to be unable to read."[{9}](#) This begins the great man's observations and impressions of the New World, skyscrapers, rural America, Washington politics, and the nation's spiritual condition.

Some of the central themes that emerge in *Sidelights*, and especially in *What I Saw In America*, are Chesterton's views of the effects of rationalism, commercialism, and the general spiritual poverty of many Americans. Although he is painting with extremely large brush strokes, there is much that can be learned about who we were at the early part of the twentieth century and how we became what we are today.

Chesterton was able to see both sides of the American experiment: the dream as well as the nightmare. He appears to dwell on the down side to balance the kind of utopian optimism that frequently blinds Americans to the true realities of their living conditions. Chesterton said that his first impression of America was of something enormous and rather unnatural, and was tempered gradually by his experience of kindness among the people. Additionally, and with all sincerity, he added that there was something unearthly about the vast system which seemed to be a kind of wandering in search of an ideal utopia of the future. He said "the march to Utopia, the march to the Earthly Paradise, the march to the New Jerusalem, has been very largely the march to Main Street. [T]he latest modern sensation is a book," referring here to Sinclair Lewis's 1920 novel *Main Street*, "written to show how wretched it is to live there."[{10}](#)

Chesterton thought about America frequently and she would be one of his favorite subjects for almost twenty-five years

after his first visit. His frequent discussion about drinking and smoking may strike many readers as peripheral, a kind of antiquated masculine fun. But these matters were crucial to Chesterton's view of a complete life and for him represented a misguided moralism in the United States. The puritanical incongruity of Americans would serve Chesterton as a point of departure for all of his thinking about the New World.

Chesterton was an Englishman and is in a position to offer criticism from the point of view of a foreigner without the difficulties of a language barrier. Although he understood that his native England and Europe at large were going through the same philosophical and social changes, it is the speed at which America was rushing to embrace all things new that alarmed him. In *What I Saw in America* one will really discover what Chesterton found alarming and dangerous about our country in the early twentieth century.

Chesterton was confronted with prohibition on both of his trips to America and was deeply concerned with its effects on both Christian and secular aspects of society. He never tired of the extended metaphor of prohibition as the condition of religion in the United States. Making a comparison between the Carrie Nation style of saloon smashing prohibition and the Nonconformists in his native England, Chesterton believed that both groups suffered from an astoundingly fixed and immovable notion of the nature of Christianity.[{11}](#)

Chesterton saw in this legalistic stance toward liquor an indicator of what was truly wrong Protestant religion in America. He said it is a pretty safe bet that if any popular American author has mentioned religion and morality at the beginning of a paragraph, he will at least mention liquor before the end of it. To men of different creeds and cultures the whole idea would be staggering.[{12}](#) The natural result was that the man on the street frequently equated Christianity with a strong stance against drinking, smoking, and gambling. As a consequence, salvation has as much to do with abstinence

as it does with regeneration.

The Victorian hypocrisy was that there were family prayers and the form of religion, but only so far as it was a cover-up for an anti-traditionalist mentality. The average Christian, believed Chesterton, was professing his religion on the one hand and embracing a pervasive and destructive industrial commercialism on the other.[\[13\]](#) The astute observation of Chesterton was of a man witnessing a strange new phenomenon, Christians reconciling their prosperity with their faith.

In spite of a Great Depression, one World War that would soon lead to another, and numerous social injustices, the twentieth century in the early thirties was still a time when personal ownership of cars, regular vacations, and numerous other opportunities were increasingly available to more Americans. This was the true formation of the American dream, and it would be closely tied to materialism in the most crass form.

Chesterton was vindicated in his harsh observations about America on several fronts. First, there was then and still remains a large segment of the Christian population that believes Christian faith to be little more than a list of prohibitions. It is not that there are not things Christians should and should not participate in, rather it is the stifling of the Christian imagination with respect to the many ways which faith can manifest itself. For Chesterton the belief that good Christians do not drink would be tantamount to saying that one must wear a tie on Sunday morning to be in good standing in the faith. In the same way that some consider the latter statement to be ridiculous it was puzzling to Chesterton, as well as C. S. Lewis, why some American Christians failed to recognize the same in the former statement.

As for the American dream, Chesterton's words are still a sober warning for the unique way in which Americans, both Christian and non-Christian, have largely become a nation of

consumers. We may read his words during the early part of the twentieth century as warnings not to repeat the same mistakes now.

The Unreasonableness of Modern Man

Chesterton was a prolific journalist whose books and contributions to over one hundred American and British journals and periodicals continue to be read by Christians throughout the world. The need to return to this seminal thinker can be seen in the relevance some of his shorter works still have today.

In the *T. P. Weekly* in 1910, Chesterton wrote a small piece titled *What is Right with the World?* In it he acknowledges the fact that the world does not appear to be getting very much better in any vital aspects and that this fact could hardly be disputed.[\[14\]](#) However, Chesterton does not leave the reader with the pessimistic observation that the world is not a very nice place. He adds that the only thing that is right with the world is the world itself. Existence itself as well as man and woman are right inasmuch as they were created right. The fact that so much is wrong did not distress Chesterton; it was merely an occasion

to demonstrate that the world bears the stigma of having been good at one time and now being evil. The blackness of the world, said Chesterton, is not so black if we recognize how and why things are like they are.

At one point in a work titled *The Common Man* Chesterton attempts to show why it is necessary for every individual to have a philosophy. The best reason being that certain horrible things will happen to anyone who does not possess some kind of coherent worldview.[\[15\]](#) Sounding very much like a contemporary Christian apologist, Chesterton said that a man without a philosophy would be doomed to live on the used-up scraps of other men's thought systems.[\[16\]](#)

Chesterton continues to challenge the idea that philosophy is for the few, arguing that most of our modern evils are the result of the want of a good philosophy. Philosophy, he said, was merely thought which had been thoroughly thought through. All men test everything by something. The question is whether the test has ever been tested.[\[17\]](#) One can see in Chesterton the same vigorous call to reflective thinking that Francis Schaeffer used fifty years later to call an entire generation of Christians to become more philosophic and begin engaging the culture at a more substantive level.

We have been attempting to make a case for the need to read G. K. Chesterton's works, and have urged those who enjoy C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, Os Guinness, or Peter Kreeft to give Chesterton a look. In closing, Chesterton's poem *The Happy Man* from his book *The Wild Night* will serve as a conclusion.

To teach the grey earth like a child,
To bid the heavens repent,
I only ask from Fate the gift
Of one man well content.
Him will I find: though when in vain
I search the feast and mart,
The fading flowers of liberty,
The painted masks of art.
I only find him as the last,
On one old hill where nod
Golgotha's ghastly trinity—
Three persons and one God.

Notes

1. J.I. Packer, forward to *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, by Francis Schaeffer (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), xiv.
2. Hosea 4:6.
3. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), 109-114.

4. Ibid., 196.
5. Ibid., 217-224.
6. Ibid., 225-236.
7. Ibid., 261-270.
8. Ibid., 207-208.
9. Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent in Francis*
A. Schaeffer Trilogy (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990),
277.
10. Ibid., 275-290.
11. Ibid., 291-302.
12. Ibid., 211.

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The Need to Read Francis Schaeffer

Todd Kappelman provides us with a compelling introduction to the thought and writings of Francis Schaeffer, one of the great Christian thinkers of the 20th century. As a Christian scholar and a visionary worldview thinker, Schaeffer applied Scriptural truth to the issues people are dealing with in the modern world. He demonstrated that Christ's truth is universal both across time and cultures.

The *Need to Read* series began several months ago with [a program on C.S. Lewis](#). The rationale for this series is that many of the great writers who have helped many Christians mature are now either unknown or neglected by many who could use these authors insights into the faith.

This installment focuses on Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), one

of the most recognized and respected Christian authors of the twentieth century. He saw so much more in what he was looking at and agonized over it much more than the rest of us. He was one of the truly great Christians of our time.[\[1\]](#) If this is the case, and I and many others believe that it is, then this question follows: What was Schaeffer looking at? The remarkable answer to this question is all of human history and the long chain of events which have led to modern man as we see him today.

In a time when true scholarship is often equated with specialization in a particular period, people, or subject, Schaeffer was a grand generalist. He was a true Renaissance man who knew something about everything, as opposed to everything about something. In addition to his remarkable and encyclopedic knowledge of human history, he was able to connect important events together such that Christians can see what has happened in human history, what is happening now, and what will happen if man continues on his present course. Schaeffer was a visionary who had an uncanny understanding of the times we live in and what mankind can expect in the near future.

Schaeffer's greatest gift, like that of C.S. Lewis, was his concern for the average Christian. He believed philosophy, theology, and ethics should not be reserved for the conversation of learned academics; rather they should be the daily concern of the man on the street. The price for ignorance of the subjects could be our life, or more importantly, our very souls. The Scriptures are very clear concerning the price of ignorance. The prophet Hosea said that God's people perish for lack of knowledge.[\[2\]](#) In light of this observation, Schaeffer's genius was his ability to communicate extremely difficult philosophical and theological issues on a non-technical level. His writings provide Christians with access to some of the most pressing concerns of our times.

Several aspects of Schaeffer's style and sweeping concerns will

be discussed in this essay. First, he perceived the wholeness of the created order. There is a basic need in all human beings to know the answers to the great questions of life, and Schaeffer believed that God has given man the answers in the form of natural and specific revelation.

Second, Schaeffer believed that man has a natural inclination to desire the reasonable. Schaeffer argued that the Christian faith is not only true, but that it is the most plausible account for the existence of man and his place in the universe. He contended that an irrational faith is not what God intended to communicate to man.

Third, Schaeffer was one of the original cultural critics of the twentieth century. He believed that mankind, both Christians and non-Christians, was adrift on a sea of irrationality. He further believed that this drift was intensifying to the point that true, orthodox Christianity was being lost.

Schaeffer and *The God Who Is There*

Francis Schaeffer developed some important themes in three of his books: *The God Who Is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*.

Lets consider *The God Who Is There* first. The major thesis in this book is that modern man has abandoned the idea of truth, and that has had widespread consequences in every area of life.

In his argumentation, Schaeffer summarizes the last half of the twentieth century, tracing the development of the intellectual climate in Western society. Previous generations had grown up with a basic operational belief that the law of non-contradiction was true. What Schaeffer would have us understand about the law of non- contradiction is this: a statement cannot be both true and false in the same way at the

same time. For example, you are either reading this essay or you are not. You cannot be both reading this and not reading it at the same time. Either you are or you are not—choose one.

When we hear something like this, our first reaction is of course we believe in this law of non-contradiction. We believe in it and live by it, even if we did not know what it was called until just a few moments ago. But Schaeffer points out that there has been a gradual decline of belief in this basic principle beginning with philosophy in the late eighteenth century. This first step in the movement away from reason is followed by second and third steps in the areas of art and music. These are, in turn, followed by the fourth steps of general culture and theology. There is much debate about which step came first and who followed whom. The important thing to realize is that after the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment in Europe, and certainly before the height of the Industrial age, men in the highest positions of academic and artistic life began to think very differently.

In the first half of this century, Western man began to think in terms of mutually exclusive truths. In other words, we began to believe that two people could believe mutually exclusive truths simultaneously and both of them could be correct. This would be like two people seeing an object and one claiming that it existed and the other claiming that it did not exist. The two men shake hands and say that they are both right in their conclusions. Objective reality is completely undermined and nothing is true. The result of this thinking is that man begins to despair of his condition.[\[3\]](#) He doesn't know what is ultimately true.

Schaeffer's ambition was to help Christians be salt and light in our world. And to do that, we have to understand how people think. Schaeffer also cautions Christians against capitulation to irrationality themselves.[\[4\]](#) In the spirit of cooperation, many Christians are choosing to remain silent when they hear people say that all religions are the same, or that

Christianity may be true for one person, but not true for another. Christians cannot afford to remain silent in a world that is embracing irrationality. The unity of orthodox Christianity should be centered and grounded on truth. This is not always easy, but it is absolutely necessary.

Escape from Reason

In *The God Who Is There*, Schaeffers main thesis is that modern man is characterized by his willingness to live a life of contradictions. In the book *Escape from Reason*, he shows how we arrived at this position, and what can be done about it.

Francis Schaeffer believed that one of the great watershed periods of human history occurred in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Reformation was a fifteenth and sixteenth century movement, but it was religious in nature and ultimately resulted in the formation of the Protestant churches. The Renaissance, argues Schaeffer, largely emphasized human reason and the achievements of man. In sharp contrast, the Reformation emphasized the will of God and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. It must be remembered that Schaeffer is generalizing in much of what is said here and that both movements had good and bad aspects.

Schaeffer maintains that men in the Renaissance believed they were great because of the wonderful art, literature, and architecture they produced. The Reformation man believed he was great because of the God who had made him. Man was made to have a relationship with his creator, but the Renaissance man found himself more and more concerned with the things of this world.[\[5\]](#)

As the emphasis on man increased, the importance of God decreased. This movement was further facilitated by discoveries in the sciences which allowed man to understand the universe on purely naturalistic principles. The result of mans success in explaining some aspects of the universe

through reason alone was that he began to try to explain every aspect of the universe through reason alone.

Men found that they were able to explain much through reason, but the larger philosophical questions proved to be too great. In addition, they discovered that there were many questions that could not be answered by reason alone. Some of these questions were: How did everything begin? Why is there something rather than nothing? What happens to us after we die? These questions are traditionally answered by theology, and the answers usually included an appeal to a divine being called God.

Modern man, thus, was faced with two possibilities. Either he could return to the answers found in the Scriptures, or he could live as though life had meaning even though he did not believe that it really did.[{6}](#) Schaeffer argued that men in the Western philosophical tradition largely opted for irrational existence, escaping the requirements of reason, hence the title *Escape from Reason*. Schaeffer's conclusion to this problem is that Christians must return to a serious belief in the Scriptures and their ability to answer the big philosophical problems, and that we must live our faith consistently in front of the world.[{7}](#) In addition, Schaeffer believed that the days are gone when the average man on the street would respond to the Gospel. The language has changed, and we must learn to speak in this new language.[{8}](#) We must educate ourselves and be ready to give an account of how modern man got into his present state of affairs.

He Is There and He Is Not Silent

In the analysis of the previous two books, we have seen that Schaeffer explains the development of modern history and how mankind has largely embraced non-reason in the area of morals. In *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, Schaeffer outlines a solution for the predicament that faces modern man. He argues that there are three areas in which modern mankind has an

absolute necessity for God: metaphysics, morals, and epistemology.[{9}](#) These are three areas of philosophy which have to do with, respectively, the problem of existence, the problem of mans moral behavior, and how man can come to a true knowledge of anything at all.

Prior to the seventeenth century, philosophy and theology recognized that they were dealing with the same basic questions. The only difference between the two disciplines was that the former appealed largely to reason and natural revelation, while the latter appealed mostly to reason and special revelation. In the middle ages, philosophy was said to be the handmaiden to theology. Theology was understood to be the queen of the sciences. When philosophy took the lead, it soon became apparent that it was not up to the task of answering the big questions. The reality of God known through His revelation, however, does provide the answers for such questions.

Lets consider the areas of metaphysics, moral, and epistemology. The metaphysical need for the existence of God implies that there must be something or someone who is big enough, powerful enough, wise enough, and willing enough to create and maintain the universe we live in. If these requirements are not met, then man is forced to admit that he is here by chance occurrence and has no special destiny.[{10}](#)

The moral necessity of Gods existence centers on man as a personal being and a being who distinguishes between right and wrong. There are only two options. Either man was created from an impersonal beginning and his moral system is a product of his culture, or man had a personal beginning and was given laws to follow and an internal sense of right and wrong.[{11}](#) The moral necessity of God is founded on the philosophical need to account for why man is both cruel and wonderful at the same time. This can only be explained in terms of the biblical account of the Fall.

The epistemological necessity of God's existence addresses our ability to know what is ultimately real. Much of the modern problem in the area of knowledge began in the seventeenth century. As the scientific revolution developed, the criteria for truth became that which could be demonstrated in a laboratory. The result was that belief in God and the miraculous, which cannot be demonstrated in a laboratory, came into doubt and were eventually dismissed by many. The final result was pessimism regarding theological truths and, more recently, any truth at all. We have all encountered the individual who asks, How do you know that? And often this question is repeated for every subsequent answer.

The only answer to these three dilemmas is an appeal to the God who is there, and to His natural and special revelation. The basis of Christianity is the belief that God is there and that man can communicate with Him. If this is not true, then we are without a foundation.

Francis Schaeffer and "The Man Without a Bible"

The purpose of this discussion of the works of Francis Schaeffer is that we hope Christians will once again turn to this great apologist for the Christian faith and learn from him. In closing, we will address one of his lesser known works titled *Death In The City*. In chapter seven, The Man Without a Bible, Schaeffer offers some advice for Christians living in a post-Christian world. He argues very convincingly that the church in America has largely turned away from God and the knowledge of the things of God. This occurred in just a few short decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s.[\[12\]](#)

We must always bear in mind that many people do not believe that the Bible is inspired or authoritative. For these people the Bible is just another book. The dismantling of biblical authority has been very efficient in the last 150 years. Very

few of our major secular universities treat the Bible as authoritative anymore. Yet many of these universities were founded at a time when no one would have doubted the importance of the Holy Scriptures. The majority of men at the end of this century hold vastly different views about the Bible than did their ancestors at the close of the previous century. So, how do we share the Christian message with the man without the Bible?

Schaeffer cites three instances where Paul spoke to non-Christians and did not appeal to the Scriptures. These are found in Acts 14:15-17; 17:16-32, and Romans 1:18-2:16. The reason that Paul did not use the Scriptures on these three occasions is that the people he was addressing did not recognize the claims that the Holy Scriptures made on their lives. In approaching these individuals, Paul appealed to the moral knowledge that men possess as a feature of their created being. Schaeffer refers to this as the manishness of man.

In Romans 1:18 we have the description of Gods wrath being poured out on man. Schaeffer believes that this is an ideal place to approach modern man. We may tell the modern non-believer that he knows that God exists and that he has suppressed this knowledge. (The knowledge of God must be understood here as natural revelation, and not the gospel.) Paul means that each and every man, regardless of what he says, knows that God exists. This knowledge of God that the non-believer possesses is supplemented by the moral argument for Gods existence. The fact that men hold beliefs about right and wrong betrays the fact that they know that God necessarily exists. Men willingly suppress this knowledge of God and this brings His wrath.

The man without the Bible has suppressed the natural revelation of God, not the special revelation found in the Scriptures. The man without the Bible has not followed his initial knowledge of God to the proper conclusions and therefore remains lost. The many men without the Bible present

both an opportunity and a challenge for the Christian. The opportunity is that this man is lost and Christians can share their faith with him. The challenge is in showing these lost people how the world around them and the human nature within them point toward the existence of God.

Francis Schaeffer was wonderful at discussing Christian truths with non-believers without appealing to the Scriptures. It is our loss if we do not familiarize ourselves with, and use, the works of one of this countrys greatest Christian thinkers.

Notes

1. J.I. Packer, forward to *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, by Francis Schaeffer (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), xiv.
2. Hosea 4:6.
3. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), 109-114.
4. Ibid., 196.
5. Ibid., 217-224.
6. Ibid., 225-236.
7. Ibid., 261-270.
8. Ibid., 207-208.
9. Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), 277.
10. Ibid., 275-290.
11. Ibid., 291-302.
12. Ibid., 211.

Culture Wars

America at (Culture) War

Americans are highly polarized when it comes to issues of morality and social norms. We feel our collective blood pressure rise as we read the daily paper or watch the news on television. We all feel the tension caused by problems like teen pregnancies, abortion, crime, poverty, and political corruption. Factions from across the political spectrum respond with social programs and ideals that, if instituted, they are sure would make America a better place for all to live. However, the problem is that these programs or ideals are often in direct conflict with each other, presupposing very different assumptions about human nature. To highlight these differences, consider the following events.

In the early '90s the American Civil Liberty Union informed members of the California State Assembly's Education Committee that they were opposed to a bill the committee was considering. The bill, which called for traditional values in school curricula, was offensive to the ACLU because it would mandate that students be taught that monogamous, heterosexual relations solely within marriage is a traditional American value. The ACLU argued that this would be an "unconstitutional establishment of a religious doctrine in public schools."¹ They went on to contend that the bill was an obvious violation of the First Amendment.

More recently, a private school in Georgia asked a student to either change his behavior or leave the school. This, in itself, is not a rare event. However, the student wasn't a discipline problem and he wasn't failing academically. In fact, he was popular and liked by many on campus. The problem was that he was cross-dressing. He dressed and behaved as a woman and was accepted by many students as a female. When the student chose to leave the school instead of changing his attire, the school's drama teacher remarked, "I really think that we all lost something precious that night." {2}

To many Americans, the ACLU's action in the first incident is incomprehensible. It seems reasonable, healthy, and obvious for schools to implement a "traditional values" model for sex education. Those on the side of the ACLU find it just as incomprehensible that anyone would see their position as unreasonable or unusual. Some might find the expulsion of the cross-dressing student to be grossly unfair, while most parents would wonder why the school took so long to act.

Regardless of your perspective, everyone agrees that Americans find themselves with deep differences on a number of fundamental issues that govern our daily affairs. Unfortunately, these deep differences have led some Americans to bomb a government building, shoot abortion doctors, or burn down a mountain top ski resort in order to further their cause.

This article will spotlight the culture war we find ourselves in and consider what a biblical response might be. Although few Christians fail to see the conflict in our society, particularly in our schools, they are far from united as to what our response should be. However, from a historical perspective, times of cultural disruption are often a great opportunity for the church, if it is being all that God desires it to be.

Orthodox vs. Progressive

Leaders of all political persuasions have taken note of the culture war that is engulfing our nation. To begin clarifying the issue, we will consider the contribution of two books that have helped to define the conflict for many religious and cultural conservatives: James Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* and William Bennett's *The De-Valuing of America*. Bennett argues that the battle over our culture is being fought between what he calls the liberal elite and the rest of society. The elite are "found among academics and intellectuals, in the literary world, in journals of political opinion, in Hollywood, in the artistic community, in mainline religious institutions, and in some quarters of the media."^{3} He feels that they are more powerful than their numbers would normally allow because they are looked upon as trend setters and opinion makers. Differing from traditional elite groups in American history, Bennett argues that these people reject the traditional bourgeois emphasis on work, frugality, sexual restraint, and self-control."^{4} As evidence for the existence of this elite, he refers to studies done by Stanley Rothman with Robert and Linda Richter. Their work portrays a media aristocracy that votes as a block for liberal candidates and on issues like abortion, gay rights, and the environment.^{5}

Bennett adds that this elite is marked by a wholesale rejection of American ideals, a calling into question of what has been known as the American dream.^{6} Evidence is not as significant as ideology for the elite. Their approach is "one of vindication, not investigation."^{7} If the middle class and the Republicans are for something, this group will instinctively be against it.

Hunter's approach to defining the warring camps is subtler and, I feel, more accurate. He would argue that there is an elite on both sides of the culture war. On the one hand is

what he calls the “orthodox” group. They have a commitment to an external, definable, and transcendent authority. From an evangelical perspective this is the God of the Bible. He is a consistent and unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity. Hunter would also include Jews and others who hold to a definable, unchanging, absolute authority.

Opposing this group are the “progressives.” Progressives are defined by the ideals of modernism, rationalism, and subjectivism. To these people truth is more a process than a constant authority. It is an unfolding reality rather than an unchanging revelation. What is interesting about the progressives is that they often hold on to the religious heritage of the orthodox, but reinterpret its meaning for modern consumption. For instance, to a gay progressive, Christ came not to free us from the penalty of sin, but to free gays from the constraints of society. Although many progressives discard religion altogether, those who claim the Christian tradition have usually adopted a liberation theology, liberating the individual from any obligation other than to love each other in a very vague sense. To love each other seems to mean allowing people do whatever is expedient in their lives.

The real difference between the “orthodox” and the “progressives” is at the faith level. Whether a person calls himself or herself a Christian or not is not nearly as important as what kind of reality they place their faith in. Hunter believes that the culture war is a war of worldviews, and that these worldviews cause us to see the world differently. How then should a Christian, one who places his faith in the sacrificial death of Christ as an atoning payment for his sins, respond to this culture war?

The Angry Christian

Unfortunately, in the eyes of the secular world Christians are often seen as angry, intolerant people. At school board meetings, outside abortion clinics, even at the funeral of a homosexual who was murdered because of his lifestyle, Christians are there to angrily condemn sin and its perpetrators. It is almost as if Christians are surprised by sin and feel that their only response is to point people to the law of God. As a result, many outside the church see Christianity as a religion of law, similar to most other world religions. This is a tragedy.

Although understandable, I don't believe that we are called as Christians to respond to the culture war in anger, especially anger directed at people. Although the wrath of God is evident in both the Old and New Testaments, condemnation of human anger is also present in each. Near the very beginning of human culture, God warns Cain about his anger and downcast face. Instead of seeking to do what was right, Cain was angry with God and his situation (Gen. 4:6-7). The wisdom literature of Proverbs teaches us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," and "A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated" (Prov. 14:17, 15:1).

In the New Testament, Paul condemns "hatred" and "fits of rage" immediately before listing the spiritual fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. James 1:19-20 is fairly straightforward in arguing that, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." Jesus set an extraordinarily high standard against anger and hatred in His Sermon on the Mount. He taught, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus is speaking to the root cause of much evil in any society: an angry, unforgiving heart.

Some may respond that righteous indignation, or anger against sin is merely emulating Christ. After all, Jesus cleared the Temple with a whip and violently overturned the moneylender's tables. Are we not allowed the same righteous indignation? I think not, especially if we take seriously God's admonition to let Him be in charge of judgment and vengeance (Rom. 12:19). In fact, Paul tells us to feed our enemy if he is hungry, give him drink if he is thirsty, and to overcome evil by doing good (Rom. 12:20-21). The difference between Jesus' righteous indignation and our anger is that Jesus, being God, has the right to judge, and being perfectly righteous His judgment is perfect. He knows the hearts of men and has no bias other than holiness itself. On the other hand, we are often most angry when our personal comfort is disturbed. To the watching world, Christians become the most interested in politics when their personal wealth or comfort is at stake.

I don't believe that God is calling His people to anger in America. We bring a message of grace to the lost, not a message of law.

Apathy

Many Christians have been active in the culture war since the early '80s. With the rise of conservative politics and the family values movement, Christians joined the Republican party in droves and joined numerous organizations in order to help fight against the moral decline of the nation. Given the popularity of the current Democratic President and what appears, in many ways, to be a rejection of the conservative moral agenda, it is tempting for many to simply retreat from activism all together.

Some Christians never did get engaged in a counter-cultural sense. In fact, an early evangelical leader in culture war activity, Francis Schaeffer, warned that most Christians were more concerned with personal peace and affluence than about having an impact in their society.{8} He was concerned that as the Christian- dominated consensus weakened, these two values would grow in their place. The picture of society we are left with is one in which people's lives are consumed by things, buying two SUV's and a nice big house in the suburbs, with a nice tall fence, color TV (a big color TV), and remote. These people do not want to know about the suffering in our urban ghettos or about the plight of Christians in other countries. They want their lives to be unimpeded by the turmoil experienced by less affluent people.

Is it wrong to have a nice house and cars? No, it isn't. But neither is it the ultimate purpose to which our Lord has called us. Gathering nice things should not be motivating our daily activities. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandments were, He responded that we are to first, love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), and second, love our neighbor as ourselves. For Christians, success in this life should be measured against these two goals. The rest of revelation, both the written Word and the life of Christ, gives us a picture of what this means in both the general culture and within the church. Christ gave us the Great Commission, to go into all nations making disciples and teaching what He taught (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul talks about us being living sacrifices and the renewing of our minds so that we will know the will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

To be indifferent about sin is to not love God; this form of apathy is incompatible with true Christian faith. However, to be indifferent about suffering in the world is equally incompatible with our faith. To ignore oppression and hatred reveals a lack of love for our neighbors. Too often Christians only seem to get excited when their rights, whether property

or religious, are threatened. This makes a mockery of our Lord's words when He said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). In Romans 12 Paul talks about blessing those who persecute you, and if it is possible, to be at peace with everyone around you.

Hebrews 12 tells us to throw off everything that entangles us, everything that keeps us from running the race marked out for us by Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Him, who endured the cross because its joyous result would be a redeemed people of God.

Ambassadors For Christ

When thinking about how to respond to the culture war in America, or in any culture, we must ask ourselves, What is it that we are trying to accomplish? In the language of real war, What are our tactical and strategic goals? Some might respond that we are here to fight sin, to rid our society of the evils of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, drug abuse, political corruption, etc. There are Christians who claim that our primary cultural objective is to reinstate the law of Moses by taking control of the government and using its legal authority to impose a moral society on the population. However, this does not appear to be the plan revealed to us in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians chapter five, Paul details the role we are to play in America or in any country we might live in. We are to be Christ's ambassadors, and our message is one of reconciliation with God. There are many religions pushing a message of law; Islam, Judaism, and most Eastern religions all focus on the works people must do in order to please God or the gods. They focus on how humanity must reform itself to gain God's favor. Christianity's message is grace, and as Christ's ambassadors we proclaim that God has reconciled us to

Himself in Christ by making "Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." God is making the righteousness of Christ available to sinners; salvation is the crediting of Christs righteousness to our personal account, thus satisfying the judgment of a holy God against our personal sins.

What about social activism, what about politics? Do we just share the gospel and ignore the problems facing our nation? No, we are to be salt and light in a decaying world. However, our trust is not in politics, which can only change a nations laws and to a lesser degree its peoples behavior. Even if abortion ended tomorrow, if every homosexual became heterosexual, and if drugs and pornography were things of the past, people without Christ would still be lost in their sins.

The role of an ambassador is a complex one. He or she must be intimately familiar with the nature of their sovereign's kingdom. Christians must seek to know God and His message in a way that can be communicated to the culture they live in. Unfortunately, Christians often know the message, but have a difficult time communicating it in a way that the surrounding culture understands, and in a way that answers the questions being asked by that society. Stating the gospel accurately and in a meaningful manner is central to being an effective ambassador for Christ.

If we are to respond to the culture war by being ambassadors for Christ, then the vitality of the church becomes far more important than controlling the White House or Congress. Understanding how to communicate the gospel of Christ becomes infinitely more valuable than having the most potent political strategy. Being faithful to Christ in this way builds Gods kingdom on earth and results in common grace as more and more believers participate in every aspect of our culture.

Notes

1. James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 310.
2. *Dallas Morning News*, 30 October 1998, 7A.
3. William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Bennett, 12.
7. Ibid.
8. Francis A. Schaeffer, *How then Shall We Live* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1976), 205.

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