

Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women

Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.

The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women. Does God really hate women? Did the apostle Paul disrespect them in his New Testament writings? In this article we'll be looking at why Christianity is the best thing that ever happened to women, with insights from Alvin Schmidt's book *How Christianity Changed the World*.[{1}](#)

"What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question," writes Dr. Schmidt, "is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran. . . .[{2}](#) This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' And he added, 'He who loves his wife loves himself.'"[{3}](#)



Jesus loved women and treated them with great respect and dignity. The New Testament's teaching on women developed His perspective even more. The value of women that permeates the New Testament isn't found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies.

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless she was accompanied by a trustworthy male escort. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with male guests in her husband's home; she had to retire to her woman's quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of a slave. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public. Women were considered inferior to men. The Greek poets equated women with evil. Remember Pandora and her box? Woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world. [\[4\]](#)

The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. As with the Greeks, women were not allowed to speak in public. [\[5\]](#)

Jewish women, as well, were barred from public speaking. The oral law prohibited women from reading the Torah out loud. Synagogue worship was segregated, with women never allowed to be heard.

Jesus and Women

Jesus' treatment of women was very different:

The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised

the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.

The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today's Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings.[\[6\]](#)

He started a conversation with her—a Samaritan, a woman—in public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: “He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself.” Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus’ day taught, “One is not so much as to greet a woman.”[\[7\]](#) So we can understand why his disciples were amazed to find him talking to a woman in public. Can we even imagine how it must have stunned this woman for the Messiah to reach out to her and offer her living water for her thirsty soul?

Among Jesus’ closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. “Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus’ teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to women].”[\[8\]](#) By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, “Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery.”[\[9\]](#)

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: “I am the

resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! "To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man."[\[10\]](#)

"All three of the Synoptic Gospels note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine. . . . This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus' day it was highly unusual. Scholars note that in the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low repute would follow a man without a male escort."[\[11\]](#) These women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the apostles (Luke 8:3).

The first people Jesus chose to appear to after his resurrection were women; not only that, but he instructed them to tell his disciples that he was alive (Matt. 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman's testimony was worthless because she was worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen.

Paul, Peter, and Women

Jesus gave women status and respect equal to men. Not only did he break with the anti-female culture of his era, but he set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

In a culture that feared the power of a woman's external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided

hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives with respect and understanding: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Consideration, respect, fellow heirs; these concepts sound good to us, but they were unheard of in the first century!

The apostle Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, one who hates and fears women. But Paul's teachings on women reflect the creation order and high value God places on women as creatures made in his image. Paul's commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and His bride, the church. He calls wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he calls husbands to submit to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He calls men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

Paul also provided highly countercultural direction for the New Testament church. In the Jewish synagogue, women had no place and no voice in worship. In the pagan temples, the place of women was to serve as prostitutes. The church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud (1 Cor. 11:5). The spiritual gifts—supernatural enablings to build God's church—are given to women as well as men. Older women are commanded to teach younger ones. The invitation to

women to participate in worship of Jesus was unthinkable—but true.

Misogyny in the Church

Author Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote:

Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as ‘The women, God help us!’ or ‘The ladies, God bless them!’; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.

She continues: “There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.”[\[12\]](#) And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

In the second century Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, “You [Eve] are the devil’s gateway. . . . You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.” Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman’s image of God was inferior to that of

the man's.{13} And unfortunately it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul's exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview.{14} The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

It's unfortunate that some of the church fathers did not allow the woman-honoring principles found in Scripture to change their unbiblical beliefs. But that is the failing of imperfect followers of Jesus, not a failure of God nor of His Word. Jesus loves women.

Effects of Christianity on Culture

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also

granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.{15}

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.{16}

Another effect of the salt and light of Christianity was its impact on the common practice of polygamy, which demeans women. Many men, including biblical heroes, have had multiple wives, but Jesus made clear this was never God's intention. Whenever he spoke about marriage, it was always in the context of monogamy. He said, "The two [not three or four] will become one flesh." As Christianity spread, God's intention of monogamous marriages became the norm.{17}

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained influence. In some cultures, such as India, widows were burned alive on their husbands' funeral pyres. In China, the crippling practice of foot binding was intended to make women totter on their pointed, slender feet in a seductive manner. It was finally outlawed only about a hundred years ago.{18}

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no

presence.^{19} It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.
2. "Men stand superior to women.... But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you then do not seek a way against them" Sura 4:34, as quoted in Schmidt, p. 97.
3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.
4. Ibid., p. 98-99.
5. Ibid., p. 101.
6. Ibid., p. 102-03.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 103-104.
10. Ibid., p. 104.
11. Ibid., p. 104-105.
12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.
13. Schmidt, p. 109.
14. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Research Group, Ltd. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=154>.

15. Ibid., p. 111.

16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.

17. Ibid., p. 115.

18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

19. Ibid., p. 115.

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Faith and Reason

Are faith and reason friends or foes? Does faith in Christ require checking your brain at the door? This essay presents 3 positions on faith and reason, from Tertullian, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Friends or Foes?

One of the more intriguing aspects of the *Indiana Jones* film trilogy is its focus on religious themes. In the third installment, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy is involved in a search for the Holy Grail, the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper. As the film reaches its climax, Indy must go through three tests in order to reach the Grail. After overcoming the first two obstacles, the final test required Indy to “step out” in faith, even though he was on one side of a cavern that appeared to be thirty feet across, without any visible way to reach the other side. Following the instructions from his father’s diary, Indy stepped into the void, and to his amazement, his foot came down on solid ground. It turned out that there was a bridge across the cavern but because the rocky texture of the bridge

perfectly matched the facing wall of the cavern, the bridge was invisible from Indy's perspective.

According to this scene, and enforced by general opinion, religious faith and human reason are opposites. Indiana Jones simply could not understand how it was possible to reach the Grail without any visible means to do so; the implication is that his decision to step out was a forfeiture of his intellect. This idea that Christian faith is a surrender of our reasoning abilities is a common one in contemporary culture.

For many Christians, the scene that we've been discussing is a disturbing one. On the one hand, it is a moment of triumph. It seems to lend credence to the importance of religious faith. Then again, it portrays faith as being a mindless exercise. Indiana Jones is an intellectual college professor who is interested in the Grail primarily as an historical artifact. His leap of faith goes against everything he stands for. This reveals a tension that has existed in the church for centuries. Is faith in Christ a surrender of the intellect? Is godly wisdom in complete opposition to what Scripture calls "worldly wisdom"? There are many who question whether the Christian should even expose himself to teaching that is not consistent with the Word of God. For example, it is a frightening prospect for many Christian parents to consider sending their children off to a secular college where the Christian faith is often ridiculed or condemned. Still others want their children to be challenged by a secular education. They consider it part of the Christian's missionary mandate to confront secular culture with their very presence. In their mind, the tendency of Christians to separate themselves from secular environments leads to an isolationist mentality that fails to reach the lost for Christ.

As we examine the relationship of faith and reason for the Christian in this discussion, there are several questions to keep in mind. Is there such a thing as Christian philosophy,

or is philosophy primarily opposed to theology? Should believers read literature that is not explicitly religious, or should we only read Christian literature? What about secular music or films? How we view the relationship between faith and reason will reveal itself in how we answer these questions. We will try to shed light on these issues as we examine three distinctive positions that have been prominent throughout church history.

Earlier, we mentioned that in the popular film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy had to make a literal leap of faith. When he stepped into the “void” in order to reach the Grail, he was unable to see the pathway to the Grail, but his “blind faith” was rewarded when it turned out that the pathway was hidden by an optical illusion. He did what most people would consider suicidal. But is this a true picture of religious faith? Is faith or religious belief irrational? In the next section we will look at the answer of Tertullian, a Christian apologist from the early church who has been accused of saying this very thing.

Tertullian's Dilemma

Tertullian was a lawyer who converted to Christ sometime around the year A.D. 197. It was he who asked the famous questions, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What have heretics to do with Christians?” Tertullian's major distinction was to create a metaphorical contrast between Athens, the home of pagan Greek philosophy, and Jerusalem, the central locale of divine revelation. Tertullian was convinced that the Christian faith and human wisdom were polar opposites. It was his conviction that God had revealed His plan of salvation in Scripture alone; to mix Scripture with the philosophy of pagans could only distort God's message. But does this mean that Tertullian believed that human wisdom is irrational? Let's look at the evidence.

Contemporary theologians who deny the rationality of Christian

belief often quote Tertullian's statement that the crucifixion should be believed because it is absurd. He also said the fact of the Resurrection is certain because it is impossible. But these statements must be understood from the context of Tertullian's own life and work. He himself utilized elements of Greek philosophy and logic that he believed to be compatible with Christian belief. The major emphasis in his writings was to contrast the coherence of Christianity with the inconsistency of his heretical opponents. When he does speak of the absurdity of Christian belief, he is actually referring to the unlikelihood that any human mind could conceive of God's redemptive plan. Like C. S. Lewis, he was convinced of the truth of the gospel by the very fact that no human being could possibly concoct such a story as is presented in Scripture. Certainly the Jews could not; the claim of Christ that He was God in the flesh was blasphemous to many of them. Nor could the Greeks create such a story; for them, the material world was inferior to the divine realm. God could not possibly assume human flesh in their philosophical reasoning. But for Tertullian, this was compelling evidence that the gospel is true! The religious and philosophical systems contemporary with the advent of Christianity would have prevented any human from simply making up such a fantastic tale. He concluded that the gospel had to originate in the mind of God himself.

To conclude, let's put Tertullian in the shoes of Indiana Jones. What would Tertullian do if faced with the prospect of crossing over the invisible bridge? My guess is that he would see such a step as consistent with God's way of directing His people. The key to understanding Tertullian's view of faith and reason is to consider what the unbeliever would think. Since most unbelievers would consider what Indiana Jones did as unreasonable, he would probably consider such an attitude as compelling proof that the person of faith must take such a step.

Tertullian, the early church apologist, was convinced that belief in the Scripture was the basis for the Christian life. He also considered Greek philosophy to be the basis for heresy in the Church. Unfortunately, he seemed to assume that all Christians intuitively understood Scripture in the same way. His motto might have been “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” But it is one thing to believe; it is another thing to understand what we believe. Next, we will consider the ideas of Augustine, who is known by the phrase “faith seeking understanding.”

Augustine's Solution

Augustine, who died in the year A.D. 430, recounts in his famous *Confessions* how as a young man he was constantly seeking for a philosophy that would be consistent and guide him to truth. At one point he abandoned any hope in his search and became a skeptic. But at the age of 33, Augustine came to accept the truth of the gospel. He recognized that the speculation of Greek philosophy was incapable in itself of bringing him to salvation. But, on the other hand, he could see that it had prepared him to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and laid the groundwork by which he came to accept the claims of Christ. Augustine believed that the Scripture was the authoritative Word of God, but in interpreting difficult scriptural concepts such as the Trinity, he found it necessary to utilize his own philosophical training to explain the teaching of Scripture.

Whereas Tertullian considered faith in Christ's revelation of himself to be the only thing worth knowing, Augustine emphasized both the priority of faith and its incompleteness without the help of reason. One of his great insights is that faith is the foundation for all knowledge. Christians are often ridiculed for their faith, as if “faith” and “gullibility” were synonyms. But Augustine reminds us that each of us must trust some authority when making any truth

claim, and that “faith” and “trust” are synonyms.

Consider a few examples: Christians and non-Christians alike agree that water freezes at zero degrees centigrade. However, I myself have never performed that experiment; I simply trust what reliable scientific studies have confirmed. Likewise, no one living today was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but all Americans celebrate that day as having been July 4, 1776. We trust the witness of those who were actually there. In other words, our knowledge *begins* with faith in some authority, just as Augustine emphasized.

But Augustine distinguished himself from Tertullian by acknowledging that philosophy does have a role in how the Christian understands God’s revelation. Because humanity is made in the image of God, we are all capable of knowing truth. Augustine found in pagan philosophy helpful ideas that enabled him to elaborate God’s Word. But it must be emphasized that his interest in pagan philosophy was not an end in itself, but rather a tool by which to grasp more deeply the meaning of Scripture.

What would Augustine have done if he had faced the choice of Indiana Jones? First, he would have needed scriptural support for such a choice. Secondly, he would have considered the logic of such a decision. Whereas Tertullian considered God’s mind to be contrary to the philosophies of man, Augustine believed God created us to think His thoughts after Him. His was a reasonable faith. This is why his motto has been described as “faith seeking understanding.”

The Synthesis of Thomas Aquinas

Now we turn to look at the teaching of the twelfth-century scholar Thomas Aquinas, whose own slogan has been called, “I understand in order to believe.”

A good way to get a handle on Thomas’s position is to

recognize that his own motto is a reversal of Augustine's *faith seeking understanding*. It was Augustine who first explained the concept of *original sin*, which states that we are alienated from God at birth because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam. Thomas agreed that our moral conformity to God had been lost, but he believed that sin had not completely corrupted our intellect. Thomas believed, therefore, that we could come to a basic knowledge of God without any special revelation. This is not to say that Thomas did not hold a high view of Scripture. Scripture was authoritative for Thomas. But he seemed to believe that divine revelation is a fuller explanation of what we are able to know about God on our own. For example, his attempts to prove the existence of God were based on the aftereffects of God's action in the world, such as the creation, rather than in the sure Word of Scripture. In contrast to Tertullian and Augustine, who placed faith in God's revelation of Christ as the foundation for knowledge, Thomas started with human reason and philosophy. His hope was to show that even people who reject the Scripture could come to believe in God through the use of their intellects. But the Scriptures were necessary since the human mind cannot even conceive of concepts such as the Trinity.

Thomas lived at a time when most of Aristotle's philosophy was first being introduced into the Latin language. This created quite a stir in the universities of the day. Up until that time, Augustine's emphasis on an education centered on Scripture was the dominant view. Thomas himself was educated in the tradition of Augustine, but he appreciated the philosophy of Aristotle as a witness to the truth. He found Aristotle to be more balanced in his approach to philosophy than Augustine had been. Whereas Augustine emphasized the eternal realm in his own philosophy, Aristotle's philosophy confirmed the importance of the natural world as well and assisted Thomas in his effort to create a comprehensive Christian philosophy which recognized that the material world

was important because it had been created by God and was the arena in which His redemptive plan was to be fulfilled. Prior to Thomas, the tendency had been to downplay the physical world as greatly inferior to the spiritual world.

If we were to place Thomas in the shoes of Indiana Jones, it is likely that he would have stepped out as well. But he would have arrived at the decision for different reasons than Tertullian or Augustine. Because of his emphasis on the thinking ability of the human race and his emphasis on physical reality, he might have knelt down on the ground and felt for the hidden pathway before actually stepping out. Since he leaned toward utilizing reason and his own understanding to discover the bridge, he would not have depended solely on revelation to cross over like the others.

We will conclude our series as we evaluate the implications of the three different views of faith and reason that we have been examining in this discussion.

Implications

We have been examining three distinctive positions on the question of faith and reason. Basically, we have been attempting to discern whether or not human reason, as expressed in pagan philosophy, is a help or a hindrance to Christian theology.

The first position we addressed was that of Tertullian, who viewed the combination of divine revelation and Greek philosophy as the root of all false teaching in the church. We then showed that even though Augustine agreed with Tertullian that faith in divine revelation is primary for the Christian, they differed in that Tertullian emphasized *belief in* the Scriptures, while Augustine focused on the *understanding* of what one believes. That is why he was willing to incorporate pagan philosophy to help further his understanding of Christian theology. He was delighted to find pagans whose

philosophy, though not Christian in and of itself, was in some way compatible with Christianity.

The third and final position we examined was that of Thomas Aquinas, who believed that all people could have a basic knowledge of God purely through natural reason. He did not agree with Augustine that the human mind had been totally corrupted by sin at the Fall. This belief led to his elevation of the power of the mind and his appreciation of philosophy. Theology is the higher form of wisdom, but it needs the tools of science and philosophy in order to practice its own trade. Theology learns from philosophy, because ultimately theology is a human task.

How we view the relationship between faith and reason can have powerful implications for how the Christian engages society with the gospel. One of the problems with the apologetics of Tertullian is that he seemed to view all that opposed him to be enemies of the gospel, rather than as potential converts. This is in stark contrast to the behavior of the Apostle Paul in Acts 17, when he proclaimed the gospel among the Greeks at Mars Hill. He did not condemn them for their initial failure to accept the Resurrection. Instead, he attempted to reach common ground with them by quoting some of their own philosophers, picking out isolated statements from pagan thinkers which were consistent with Scripture, while still maintaining the absolute truth of Scripture as his foundation. In this way, he was able to gain a hearing with some of his listeners. But this presupposes some familiarity with pagan thought. This familiarity made Paul a more effective witness to his audience.

Paul's attitude toward pagan philosophy seems to be consistent with those of Augustine and Aquinas. All three felt it was beneficial to know what the non-believer thought in order to communicate the gospel. How then can believers apply this attitude today without compromising their values? Perhaps it involves Christian parents listening with their children to

the music they enjoy, and then constructively discussing its message. After all, many contemporary musicians utilize their music to proclaim their own philosophies of life. Or maybe it will mean watching a popular movie that has taken the country by storm, with the goal of discerning its importance to the average viewer. Rather than criticizing literature, philosophy, film, or music that is not explicitly Christian, we may find that by attempting to appreciate their value or worth, no matter how meager, we may be better able to dialogue with, and confront, our post-Christian culture with the claims of Christ.

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