

# Why Do So Many People Reject the Gospel and How Can We Respond?

What do we do when people aren't interested in hearing the Gospel, when they are either antagonistic or apathetic? When faced with an audience that either rejects the God of the Bible or holds to a contrary worldview, evangelism often must appropriate the work of apologetics. An important part of apologetics is the work of pre-evangelism practiced by both Francis A. Schaeffer and C. S. Lewis. Pre-evangelism seeks to prepare the way for speaking the Gospel to those who either reject the Christian message or object to certain claims of Christianity. This is not a substitute for, but is in conjunction with the Holy Spirit in seeking to give honest answers to honest questions while presenting the Gospel of Christ. This talk seeks to demonstrate the importance of pre-evangelism.

*“For the Kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power.” (1 Cor. 4:20 ESV)*

**Bruce A. Little** has master’s degrees in Apologetics and Religion and a PhD in Philosophy of Religion and a DMin in Apologetics. Presently, he serves as Senior Professor of Philosophy and director of the Francis A. Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he has been on faculty since 2001. Since 1995, he has travelled widely in Europe and Asia, lecturing in universities, teaching in a variety of schools and presenting papers at conferences. He has published in various professional journals, edited several books, either authored or co-authored six books and contributed chapters in several books the last being *God and Evil* published by InterVarsity Press, 2013.

## I. Why do So Many People Turn a Deaf Ear to the Gospel?

### A. Theologically, there is the factor of sin and the corruption of our cognitive apparatus

1. Ro. 1:28; Eph. 4:17-19

### B. Culturally

1. The age of technique and pragmatism
  - a. Christian approaches sound too much like propaganda
    - i. Catchy slogans
      - Sounds more like manipulation than persuasion
    - ii. Exaggerated words
      - Overstatements
  - b. More emphasis on method than humanity

## II. Why Do So Many People Reject the Gospel?

### A. Theologically

1. The scandal of the cross
  - a. 1 Cor. 1:18, 25

### B. Philosophically

1. The Rise of Naturalism
  - a. The loss of the universal leads to relativism

- b. Everything is explained in naturalistic terms
- c. God is not within the range of possibilities
  - i. Naturalism allows for people to be religious without believing in God

### C. Culturally

- 1. The idea of Progress makes God unnecessary and even an obstruction to Progress
- 2. Hostile intellectual climate and technological surge in the West
  - a. Corruption of language
    - i. Words are disassociated from reality as a means of re-formulating how reality is to be viewed<sup>1</sup>
    - ii. Words are used for effect, not truth conveying
  - b. Mass media particularly advertising<sup>2</sup>; False Narratives; Newspeak, and so forth make sorting out the real from the unreal very difficult<sup>3</sup>
    - i. People are growing in suspicion of what they hear unless they already agree with it
  - c. The digital age isolates people and destroys conversation
    - i. Sherry Turkle argues the digital age has made us more isolated<sup>4</sup> and less able in face-to-face conversation<sup>5</sup>

## III. How might we respond

- A. Understand the centrality of the power of the Truth (Ro. 1:16-17; Heb. 4:12)
  - 1. Faith comes by hearing the Word (Ro. 10:17)
- B. Commit to the necessary work of the Spirit
  - 1. In the end, it is the Spirit that opens doors and convicts hearts (Jn. 16:7-9)
- C. Understand the major ideas shaping the intellectual climate
  - 1. The effects of naturalism and its relativism (Idealism)
- D. Understand the power of mediated reality
  - 1. People want to keep their options open

---

<sup>1</sup> Sherry Diestler, *Becoming a Critical Thinker*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2009), 278.

<sup>2</sup> PBS Home Frontline Video, *The Persuaders* 2004 number FRL62303

<sup>3</sup> Scruton. *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands* (2015), 9

<sup>4</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together*

<sup>5</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015)

- E. Recognize attempts to escape the conclusions of the naturalist's position
  - 1. Happiness through accumulation of things – the minimalist's position
  - 2. Detachment from things (Buddhism)
  - 3. The critique is right, but the solution will fail
- F. Develop a big-picture view of the world/reality
  - 1. Pre-evangelism does not begin with a dogmatic statement of the Gospel but with reality<sup>6</sup>
    - a. Only one reality therefore be keen to talk about the big picture
- G. Understand there is no one template that can map on to every encounter<sup>7</sup>
  - 1. We are dealing with men and women – human beings who are complicated; they are more than their function, more than their weaknesses or failures
- H. Treat the unbeliever as part of humanity
  - 1. We must not be mechanical, but personal
  - 2. Humanity as revealed in Scripture – something more than the individual is a sinner
    - a. Stop categories that group people (millennials)
  - 3. We must not appear dogmatic, but engaging
    - a. Ask thoughtful questions and then listen
- I. Learn to turn a statement into a point for conversation (Jn. 3)
  - 1. We must not make our persuasive efforts be misunderstood as manipulation
- J. Learn to turn a question into a point for conversation (Jn. 4; Lk. 18:18)
  - 1. Think of your conversation as a path to begin the “believing process” in the hearer
    - a. Jn. 3:16 is not just about what the person must do for salvation, but what Christians must do in the conversation: help them to move on in the believing process and then show them how the Scriptures answer the questions
      - i. This means to re-evaluate their belief about themselves, the world, life, death, and so forth
      - ii. Talk about life before talking to them about the Gospel – the Gospel must answer something for them
    - b. Ro. 10:13ff teaches: hearing, believing, calling

---

<sup>6</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God who is There* (vol. 1) in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vol. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 140-141

<sup>7</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God who is There* (vol. 1) in *The Complete Words of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vol. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 177

- K. Consider areas that can guide leading the person on the believing path
  - 1. What do we have in common with humanity?
  - 2. Why do we long for meaning?
  - 3. Why do we require justice?
  - 4. Why do we long for goodness and beauty?
- L. Work to incarnate Christian thinking in our culture-making
  - 1. Culture-making is first about truth, goodness, beauty, and unity
    - a. This is what man longs for because he was created to live where these categories rule

#### IV. In summary

- A. Theologically
  - 1. The world is at odds with Christ
  - 2. The Cross is a scandalous message – one of grace
    - a. The importance of prayer
    - b. The power of the Word
    - c. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit
- B. Culturally
  - 1. Understand the culture around YOU
  - 2. Discern the signposts in culture that reveal the inner concerns of man
  - 3. Avoid methods, technology, categories, and conclusions that are inimical to the Gospel

#### ***Suggested Readings:***