

*What if someone you didn't like actually held the keys to your future?*

I once worked for a man I did not like for a year. I made the decision to work for him because I had no other options. I thought this man was arrogant, plastic, and had little depth when he spoke.

As people who carry the key to eternal life with God, we should be likeable.

After the year was up, I understood what made the man and saw another side of him.

- His arrogance covered up insecurity. Every time he tried to lead, the old-time Pentecostals would attack him. They never met a payroll, or lead a congregation, but they, and they alone heard from God – ‘so Pastor, do what I say. Otherwise, you are not hearing from God.’ Foolishly, they did not want change.
- His fakeness, that plastic façade, was like a band aid covering sheep bites. He had been a popular state-wide youth director, and now he was a beaten-up pastor.
- No, he still did not have much depth to his messages.

I learned to love the man.

He did hold the keys to **my future** in two ways I did not foresee:

- 1) He pastored the first ‘international’ church I ever saw. In the 1980’s it was one third black, white, and Hispanic. What **held it together** was the pastor’s genuine love for the people and their love for God.
- 2) Personally, he encouraged Connie and I to pursue adoption. They were our character reference for the home study that brought Annie into our family.

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- My illustration does not fit exactly; I made the decision to work for him because I had no other options.
- Your skeptical neighbors have no reason to engage with you if you offend them or are hypocritical.

A sentiment among Mahatma Gandhi's friends was, 'If it weren't for the Christians, I'd be a Christian.'<sup>1</sup>

**Today**, is the final of our short series, *a skeptic's guide to faith*. **These messages** have been very different from my usual preaching because my audience are those who are skeptical of the Christian faith.

- Let's 'Be merciful to those who doubt (Jd 22 NIV).'

Our **journey** has been to answer some big questions.

A Skeptic's Guide to Faith

'How can we trust that Jesus rose from the dead?'

'How do we know there is objective truth?'

'How do we know there is an afterlife?'

'If God exists, why is there evil?'

'How do we know the Bible is true?'

'Why can't I live as I see fit?'

'Doesn't science disprove Christianity?'

**Today**, we will examine how skeptics view us. The question is 'What if I don't like Christians?'

## Christians

*A Skeptic's Guide to Faith*



Deeper than liking or not liking someone, is the question: 'Are Christians intolerant and narrow-minded?'

Here's how they arrive at their thinking.

### 1. Skepticism & Power (Truth).

The **Christian concept** of truth is very different than the postmodern view. They consider us intolerant and narrow-minded because ...

- We believe in a truth that corresponds to reality, *not* a power group.
- We believe tolerance is not a good judge of right and wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> Source is more likely to be Bara Dada's 1920's comment: 'Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians, you are not like him.' [Why did Gandhi say, 'If it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian?' – The Forum – Agora Dialogue](#)

Because **Postmodernism** ‘suggests absolute **truth** is either nonexistent or unimportant,’<sup>2</sup> there is a vacuum that is being filled with power. Truth is a tool of power - socially, politically, and economically.<sup>3</sup> There are only tribal power groups.

- “Power is knowledge.” – Michel Foucault Truth is determined by power and not by objective truth metrics.
- Think of tribal political news – facts do not matter, only power. Lying about facts is okay if it increases power.
- Christianity is a competing power group.

At the same time people long for community but resist commitment.

- ‘We owe fealty to no one but ourselves.’ – Thomas Howard ... *We are* the center of attention for ourselves, and the only measure of values.’<sup>4</sup>

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Those we meet are very **skeptical of everything**.<sup>5</sup>

- Hidden behind the logic, skeptics ask whether Christians are trustworthy.
- We must walk our talk and engage in pre-evangelism.
- Even Paul did not try to reel them in on the first cast. He knew they had questions that needed to be answered.

On four occasions we see Paul engaging in pre-evangelism.<sup>6</sup> For example, ‘He *reasoned* in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day (Acts 17:17 NIV).’

*Pre-evangelism*

Content is Christian doctrine

Based on reason

*Evangelism*<sup>7</sup>

Content is gospel (sin, cross, grace)

Based on revelation

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<sup>2</sup> Dillon Burroughs, ‘Are Christians Intolerant and Narrow-Minded?’ in Joseph M. Holden, ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2018) 97.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism*, 85.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Howard, *Chance or the Dance? A Critique of Modern Secularism* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2018), 80, 84

<sup>5</sup> Our ‘postmodern (society) is characterized by a deep hermeneutic of suspicion’, James K.A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 315.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 14:8-18, 17:16-34, 24:5-21, 26:1-29.

<sup>7</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 10.

Goal is understanding

Goal is faith

How we live our lives is very important. Paul said, 'We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us (2Co 6:3 NLT).'

- That is a very high bar to meet.
- We must be credible messengers of the Good News.
- We must walk our talk, otherwise the gospel the see written on our live will not impact them at all.

There are many qualities I could look at today, but let's look at two. The first is attractional.

## 2. Attractional.

If you are a **naturally grumpy**, critical person, please listen up.

Jesus was an attractional person.

- On the one hand, Isaiah said that 'He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in *his appearance* that we should desire him (Is 53:2NIV).' Outwardly, he did not naturally attract others.
- But on the other hand, people were drawn to him because of what he taught, miracles, and who he was.
- 'Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee ... <sup>2</sup> A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick (Jn 6:1-2 NLT).'
- People were drawn to Jesus for food, because they were sick and there was the potential of getting healed, and his teaching. They saw something in him!

I know you are thinking, 'I've never done a miracle. I am not Jesus.' You are mistaken on that point, 'The Spirit of God ... *this same Spirit* (is) living within you (Ro 8:11 NLT).'

In a sense, you are Jesus here on earth. Smile. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

Let's dig a little deeper. Peter wrote, '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, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1Pe 3:15 -16 NIV).'

The **context** is that we should not be afraid to give answers in a hostile environment.

- We **should be ready**. We should study ways to respond to their questions. Muslim children are taught how to question Christian children about their faith that leaves our children questioning their faith.

- **Not everyone will ask. Some are hardhearted**, not everyone is going to ask us.
- Our **conversation** should be kind, 'gentleness and respect.'
- We are to **do this when people** are 'speaking maliciously against you.' It is *assumed* that **we will have opposition** – some human and some by spiritual forces. In the face of opposition, we are to be gentle, respectful and attractional. *How?*

In this case, hope. There are **many attractional qualities**, love, mercy, kindness, etc. but here it is hope.

- *In the face of* **persecution**, slander, and malicious speech, we are to be people of hope.
- Hebrews notes that 'Hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (He 6:19 NIV).'
- Hope opens the door for joy and peace (Ro 15:13), and even more hope.

We should have positive qualities rather than negative qualities. Who would you rather spend time with? Someone filled with ...

- Despair or hope
- Criticism or joy
- Cliques or love

People are drawn to positive qualities. There is a reason KLOVE plays 'positive and encouraging' music.

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Let's turn to being trustworthy.

### **3. Trustworthy.**

Nothing hinders the Good News more than if we Christian do not walk our talk. If we are hypocrites, then Satan has thwarted God's plan.

We are starting at a disadvantage with our neighbors. When I first started in ministry pastoring was an honorable profession even from a secularist's perspective. They would say something like, 'Someone needs to provide a crutch for those who need an imaginary god.' Now, my title is not honored out there in the world. Hypocrites who believe they need a jet to spread the gospel, or demand a large amount of money, or

who take advantage of others sexually, or who have abused their position of authority, have lowered my calling to among the least trusted professions in America.

Paul says that 'Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful (1Co 4:2 NIV).'

A friend on a recent podcast said that trust requires ...

Trust requires ...

- Character, Mt 5:16. We must be people of integrity who strive for holy living. I could tell lots of stories about how God's people have fallen short here. I had one guy who did not believe in paying taxes even though I pointed out 'render to Caesar what is Caesars (Mt 22:21).'
- Competency, 2Ti 2:15. We must be competent at work, and 'handling the word of truth (2Ti 2:15).'
- Consistency, 1Co 4:2. If you consistently love and show godly character in how you live, you will win over the most hard-hearted soul.

I think of the runaway slave Onesimus. He broke trust. Paul could have commanded Philemon to take Onesimus back, but instead, 'I appeal to you on the basis of love (Philemon 8).'

- Trust can be rebuilt - but only through many right decisions over time.
- Onesimus became so faithful that there is some evidence he became a regional overseer of churches, an early bishop. Slave by day, shepherd by night.

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### **Conclusion.**

C.S. Lewis admitted **he disliked** Christian music, Christian buildings, and Christian culture. But his **pride began to peel away** *when* he saw the sincere devotion of ordinary

believers — ‘people of quite different outlooks and different education.’<sup>8</sup> Their lives rang true.

Our spiritual adversary is smart. The Bible says that in the last days,

- ‘Some will ... will follow deceptive spirits and *teachings* that come from demons (1Ti 4:1 NLT).’
- ‘Don’t let anyone capture you with *empty philosophies* and *high-sounding nonsense* that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ (Col 2:8 NLT).’
- ‘Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil (Ep 5:15-16 NIV).’

Let’s plow the hard soil of their hearts by living godly lives and answering those who ask. In time, the Holy Spirit will use some of us to plant the seeds of the Good News.

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ‘Answers to Questions on Christianity’, (1944), 61-62. ‘Christianity was mainly associated for me with ugly architecture, ugly music, and bad poetry’, C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1955), 172.