

# A Post-Christian Generation

**Introduction.** It may come as no surprise that the influence of Christianity in the United States is waning. Rates of church attendance, religious affiliation, belief in God, prayer, and Bible-reading have been dropping for decades. Americans' beliefs are becoming more post-Christian and, concurrently, religious identity is changing.

Generation Z was born between 1999 and 2015, and they are the first truly "post-Christian" generation. More than any other generation before them, Generation Z does not assert a religious identity. They might be drawn to spirituality, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations, many of whom received a basic education on the Bible — and it shows.

For Generation Z, "atheist" is no longer a dirty word: The percentage of teens who identify as such is double that of the general population (13% vs. 6% of all adults). The proportion that identifies as Christian likewise drops from generation to generation. Three out of four Boomers are Protestant or Catholic Christians (75%), while just three in five 13- to 18-year-olds say they are some kind of Christian (59%).

So what has led to this sharp falling off? When non-Christians of all ages are asked about their biggest barriers to faith, the six results are worth considering given the fact that our own children may one day make the same arguments (1 Peter 3:15).

## ***I. A Good God Would Not Allow Evil Or Suffering***

- A. One of the most frequent, and thus one of the most important, causes of unbelief is the existence of evil, pain, and suffering in the world. The former televangelist Charles B. Templeton, who started the "Youth for Christ" rallies and was a very well-known evangelist with the Billy Graham Crusade, just quit one day. He abandoned it all — not just the Billy Graham Crusade, but belief in God, Christ, the Bible, and heaven. He wrote, "I was ridding myself of archaic, outdated notions. I was dealing with life as it is. There would be an end to asking the deity for his special interventions on my behalf because I was one of the family ... If there is a loving God, why does he permit — much less create — earthquakes, droughts, floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters which kill thousands of innocent men, women, and children every year? How can a loving, omnipotent God permit — much less create — encephalitis, cerebral palsy, brain cancer, leprosy, Alzheimer's and other incurable illnesses to afflict millions of men, women, and children, most of whom are decent people?"
- B. We bring this up merely to document the role that evil, pain, and suffering have played, and still continues to play, as an important cause of man's unbelief.
  - 1. In 1851, Charles Darwin abandoned once and for all any vestige of belief in God after the death of his oldest daughter, Annie.
  - 2. Nine years later, on September 15, 1860, Thomas Huxley was to watch his oldest son, four-year-old Noel, die in his arms from scarlet fever.
  - 3. Samuel Langhorne Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain) became embittered against God after the death, in 1896, of his favorite daughter, Suzy.
  - 4. In the mid-1960s, a devoutly religious young man from Chattanooga, was a role model for all of his classmates. He led a prayer group and planned to become a foreign missionary — until his sister died of leukemia and his father

committed suicide. The boy's belief in God collapsed he subsequently became one of America's most outspoken unbelievers, humanists, and pro-abortion advocates. What was his name? Ted Turner, founder of world-famous CNN and the Turner Broadcasting System.

- C. At the end of His six days of creation (Genesis 1:31), God surveyed all that He had made, and proclaimed it "very good."
  - 1. Pestilence, disease, and death were unknown. Man existed in a paradise of happiness and beauty where he shared an intimate and eternal relationship with his Maker (Genesis 3:8, 22).
  - 2. The peacefulness and tranquility of the first days of humanity were not to prevail, however. Moses informs us that as a direct consequence of human sin, the Earth was "cursed" (Genesis 3:17). But, matters deteriorated rapidly.
- D. The cause of all that is wrong with the earth is not godliness but ungodliness. Since God is love, and since love allows freedom of choice, God allows freedom of choice (cp. Joshua 24:15; John 5:39-40). God did not create men and women to serve Him without any kind of free will on their part. Mankind now reaps the consequences of the misuse of freedom of choice (i.e., the sin) of previous generations (Galatians 6:5-8).
- E. Instead of blaming God because evil, pain, and suffering exist, we should turn to Him for strength, and let tragedies, of whatever nature, remind us that this world never was intended to be a final home (Hebrews 11:13-16). Our time here is temporary (James 4:14), and with God's help, we are able to overcome whatever comes our way (Psalm 46:1-3; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Peter 5:10).

## **II. *Christians Are Hypocrites***

- A. On occasion our own actions have the potential to drive others toward unbelief. Try as we might, we still sin, sometimes appallingly. There always have been stories of graphic hypocrisy and sordid misconduct on the part of Christians (cp. Acts 5:1-11).
- B. Such hypocrisy and misconduct are hard pills to swallow even for fellow Christians.
  - 1. Yet put yourself in the place of the person who already is struggling with doubts, not only about the system of belief, but about God as well. From their vantage point, when the system "fails" (i.e., when its adherents are unable to conform to it successfully in their own lives), what, then, shall be said about the God behind the system (Proverbs 25:19)?
  - 2. This also provides ammunition for those who are searching for what they consider to be legitimate reasons not to believe in God (1 Timothy 5:14).
- C. While we acknowledge the devastating effect that can result from the hypocrisy of believers, and while we make no attempt to justify or excuse such conduct, at the same time we have to recognize the fact that it is unfair to blame God for the blunders of humanity.
  - 1. Rejecting God because of hypocrisy in the lives of some of His followers can become a two-edged sword.
  - 2. It is contradictory for an unbeliever to attempt to justify his unbelief by pointing out hypocrisy in someone else.

3. By suggesting that a believer is a hypocrite, the unbeliever implies that there is a system of belief that, when properly adhered to, would legitimize the conduct of the believer. Where does that leave the unbeliever?
- D. No one faulted hypocrisy more than Jesus (Matthew 23:1-36). But “hypocrite” is sometimes misapplied. One is not a hypocrite because he is weak, and sins at times in his struggle. One is not a hypocrite because he never perfectly achieves God’s standard. One is not a hypocrite because he is inconsistent.

### **III. Science Refutes Too Much Of The Bible**

- A. What scientific discovery has ever disproved any Bible teaching?
1. Many famous scientists from the past and today have believed the scriptural account of Genesis 1-11 which includes creation and the Flood.
  2. Some of the greatest minds in the history of science have believed in supernatural creation. Men like Newton, Pasteur, Kepler, Lister, Boyle, Pascal, and others — household names in science — were not atheists; they believed that science and creation were quite compatible.
- B. Sometimes it is said that believing in these miracles is unscientific, but this is mistaken.
1. The reason why is because science studies natural laws and the way the physical universe operates barring any outside intervention by a divine agent.
  2. If God exists and is the author of these natural laws, God can intervene on occasion and provide an exception to the ordinary operations of nature to show that He is alive and active.
  3. This exceptional action no more undermines science than the exceptional presidential pardon undermines the legal system.
- C. Sometimes people say “only science can give us knowledge” but this is self-refuting since there is no scientific experiment that can prove that statement.
1. The Bible mentions several accurate scientific facts: food and sanitation guidelines (Leviticus 11:9-12, 24-43; 13:1-17), life in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), the shape of the earth (Isaiah 40:22), the suspension of earth by gravity (Job 26:7), and the number of stars (Jeremiah 33:22).
  2. When the Bible does mention scientific fact, it is accurate. This shows that a biblical worldview, which existed long before modern science, is valid.
- D. Creationists have an impressive arsenal of evidence to confirm the conclusion that the creation model better fits the available scientific facts than the evolution model. Darwinism is a merely materialistic philosophy masquerading as science, and people are recognizing it for what it is. Science, done right, points toward God. There is no war between science and religion; that is a myth. The positive case for intelligent design in the universe is totally compelling (Psalm 19:1-6).

### **IV. I Don’t Believe In Fairly Tales**

- A. Christians who start with the presupposition that the Bible is true can explain the available evidence — logically, consistently, and correctly.
1. If the universe were just a random cosmic accident, there is no reason for it to follow certain laws. Without a logical God who created everything including us in His own image (Genesis 1:27) — which is why we are able to use the laws

- of logic — there is no reason to believe there is any order, causality, or logic in the universe.
- a) For example, the laws of nature are orderly and logical (Jeremiah 33:25). It makes sense that an orderly and logical God would create a universe that displays some of His characteristics (Romans 1:20).
  - b) Random, non-directional genetic “accidents” have never been observed to create order, nor has non-life been observed to give rise to life. The only explanation that makes sense of the laws of nature, laws of logic, and existence of life is the transcendent God.
2. There is no way for a naturalist to explain why these laws exist or where they came from. And to just say, “That’s just how it happened” is to take a great leap of blind faith. Thus, both the Christian and the non-Christian must place their faith somewhere as a starting point; we choose to put our faith in God’s revealed, perfect word.
- B. The Bible can be verified because it has evidence which has held up to 2,000 years of intense scrutiny.
1. If people can never be sure who originally wrote the Bible then how do they know it has changed so much? What evidence are they basing this belief on?
  2. As a matter of fact, the Bible has remained the most accurate ancient work ever. This can be seen from the tens of thousands of copies and fragments that have been found.
  3. Words have obviously been translated from the original language, but there is no evidence that the meaning of the texts has changed. That much of the Bible’s meaning has been lost remains a baseless and unsubstantiated claim (cp. Matthew 24:35).
- C. Other “holy books” exist, but they cannot explain everything around us in a logical, consistent, and correct manner.
1. The Bible explains why dogs always produce dogs (Genesis 1), why evil happens (Genesis 3), why there are rock layers (Genesis 7-8), why there are so many people groups (Genesis 10-11), and why we are here (Ecclesiastes 12). No other “holy book” can explain all these issues because none of them tell the true history of the world.
  2. Religious books, such as Islam’s Qur’an, Mormonism’s Book of Mormon, and Hinduism’s Vedas, contradict the Bible; therefore, they cannot be scripture.
    - a) For example, the Qur’an in two chapters (Surah 4:171 and 23:91) says God had no son, but the Bible is clear that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (Matthew 26:63-64).
    - b) The Qur’an even contradicts itself. One passage says Jesus will be with God in paradise (Surah 3:45) and another states that He will be in hell for being worshiped by Christians (Surah 21:98).
    - c) The Book of Mormon, prior to the 1981 change, says that American Indians will turn white when they convert to Mormonism (2 Nephi 30:6; cp. 2 Nephi 5:21; 3 Nephi 2:12-15).
  3. If these writings were truly from God, such discrepancies and non-sensical statements could not exist.

## V. *There's Too Many Injustices In Christianity*

- A. Even when those of us who firmly believe in God, and who confidently accept the Bible as His inspired communication to mankind, strive diligently to conform our words and deeds to those set out in God's word, we sometimes still fail. David was a man after God's "own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), yet he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband murdered (2 Samuel 11-12). Peter loved his Master dearly, yet denied Him publicly three times on the eve of His crucifixion (Matthew 26:34, 69-75).
1. Adding to the problem is the fact that we may be sincere in what we do or say, yet still be entirely wrong (cp. Numbers 4:15, 19-20).
  2. There can be no doubt that Uzzah was sincere in his attempts to protect the ark, but he was sincerely wrong (2 Samuel 6:6-8).
- B. Unfortunately, throughout human history there are several examples of those who have professed the high standard of the New Testament, yet who have committed unjust acts in the name of God.
1. For example, in the time period between A.D. 1095 and 1270, eight different crusades occurred, during which armies representing "Christendom" battled Muslims in and around Jerusalem to gain control of the "holy city" and force Mohammed's followers into submission to Christ.
  2. In 1613, Galileo published his first musings about the possible truthfulness of the Copernican system of planetary movements (i.e., that the earth moves around the Sun). In 1616, a decree was issued by the Catholic Church that prevented Galileo from publishing any of his additional supportive evidence. In 1632, he published that evidence, and one year later, he was found guilty by an Inquisition in Rome. He had to recant his findings and spent the rest of his life under house arrest.
  3. In modern times, events have been just as unsavory. In 1988, Salman Rushdie authored *The Satanic Verses*, a book that drew the ire of radical Iranian Muslim spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) in the name of Allah, calling for the immediate assassination of Rushdie. Rushdie was forced to go into hiding in Britain for several years.
  4. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants have battled each other for decades under the flags of their respective religions. Innocent adults, teenagers, and children die by the hundreds — all in the name of God.
  5. In Yugoslavia, "Christian" Serbs depart on "search and destroy" missions in an effort to rout Muslim forces. "Ethnic cleansing" is carried out — again, in God's name.
  6. Closer to home, militants have bombed abortion clinics, maiming and killing patients and staff. These same individuals declare "open season" on medical doctors who perform abortions, and these practitioners subsequently are shot as they stand at their kitchen window or get in their car to drive to work. All in the name of God.
- C. The unbeliever's case is made for him, and the roots of his unbelief grow deeper, as he witnesses what he views as unjust, wicked acts carried out by people who

are supposed to live according to the Bible. How could a good God sanction such barbaric inhumanity, and why would anyone want to serve such a God?

D. How should the believer respond to these kinds of actions?

1. First, admit that such events as the brutality of the Crusades, the murder of abortionists, or the ethnic cleansing of Muslims are unjust deeds that never should have occurred. The acts committed are abhorrent and the attitudes of those responsible are deplorable. These events are contrary to God's nature (Luke 6:27-35).
2. Second, it is unfair to blame God for unjust acts committed in His name by those who claim to believe in Him, yet who disobey His will. The fact that someone commits an act "in God's name" does not mean that the act itself is sanctioned by the One in whose name it was committed (Matthew 7:21-23). For example, when law enforcement officers act "in the name of the law," but illegally beat a suspect to obtain a coerced confession, does the law bear the blame for their offenses? No! The law specifically forbade their actions.
3. Third, it is important to separate the real believer from the counterfeit believer. Just because someone claims to be a believer does not necessarily mean that he or she actually is a believer (Matthew 7:15-20). A counterfeit remains a counterfeit regardless of the fact that it claims (or even appears) to be genuine. Its genuineness is determined by whether or not it successfully matches the list of characteristics for what is actually real.
4. Fourth, speaking of consistency, we need to realize that it is not just the believer who should be held to such a standard. The unbeliever needs to comply as well. When you examine the legitimate teachings and fruits of a particular system, ask yourself: "Which one has more to commend itself — belief in God, or unbelief?"

#### ***VI. I Had A Bad Experience At Church***

- A. No matter how good the congregation is, everyone will have a bad experience eventually. God provided for this by encouraging us to be longsuffering and forgiving (Ephesians 4:31-32). Furthermore, when we know of issues that exist among brethren, God has told us how to fix them (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17).
- B. As older Christians, we need to be extra sensitive to the way criticism is presented to our children and young people. While this was the objection with the smallest percentage, it still draws the young away from the faith.

**Conclusion.** For many teens, truth seems relative at best and, at worst, altogether unknowable. Their lack of confidence is on pace with the broader culture's all-out embrace of relativism. More than half of all Americans, both teens (58%) and adults (62%), agree with the statement "Many religions can lead to eternal life; there is no 'one true religion.'"

We understand that younger people are going to be influenced by their culture. There is nothing we can do to stop that. But what we can do is offer legitimate, biblical reasons for what the scriptures teach (1 Peter 3:15). In this way, younger people can make their minds up and stay faithful to God's word.