

# *The Walls Within: Barriers That Keep Us From Spreading the Gospel*

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## **Ideas That Separate**

Modern culture suffers from a loss of belief in the existence of a standard of truth. We live in a society where everyone has “his own truth.” Many no longer believe that there is an infinite and personal God involved in our world. With this loss of belief, society has also lost its confidence in transcendent moral law. Instead, our commitment is to enjoy individual freedom and pursue personal happiness. Fewer and fewer people believe they will have to give an account to the Supreme Judge. Along with this loss of belief goes our sense of sin and objective guilt.

We may summarize this loss of truth by saying that society has lost the Christian story that makes sense of our world, acts as our moral guide, and fills us with a confident hope for the future. People may still hear the Christian story in the sentimentalized form of a Christmas carol, but it is no longer heard as truth. It is simply a comforting message.

Perhaps even more unsettling is the recognition that these walls of unbelief affect those within the Christian church. Do we believe firmly that this message of the Gospel is truth—what Francis Schaeffer called “true truth”? Or are we influenced by the skepticism and uncertainty rampant in the world? What we believe about truth will influence the way we relate to the non-Christians we know.

## **Faith Without Life**

Yet another wall is raised by the lack of evidence of faith in the Christian church. People still mention the scandal of the televangelists as a primary objection to considering the claims of the Gospel. Our hearts are made heavy by the all-too-frequent failures of sexual chastity and fidelity among priests and pastors. A friend who is in business asked me, “Why do so many Christian businessmen lack integrity in their business dealings?” (And this came from an unbeliever widely known and respected for his integrity.)

Despite all our talk about moral values, abortion and divorce rates are similar in the evangelical community to those for the culture as a whole. In a George Gallup poll only about ten percent of respondents said their Christian faith has an effect on their daily life.

This lack of evidence of the reality of our faith is a formidable obstacle in seeking to make God’s truth known in our world. We have to acknowledge this downfall with grief and repentance, both to the Lord and to unbelievers who raise this problem as an objection.

## **The Loss of a Common Language**

Yet another wall arises from the lack of knowledge of Scripture in our society. Most of those around us no longer have any grasp of what the Bible teaches, nor do they understand the language that Christians are

accustomed to using. People simply do not talk about justification, sanctification, redemption, or sin. Language that is precious to us is an unfamiliar dialect to most people around us. This means that “church” as usual, and sermons that do not acknowledge this problem, are difficult for our contemporaries to comprehend.

### “Separate” from the World

The last wall, and perhaps the most difficult to acknowledge and overcome, is the wall created by our sense of alienation from those around us. Many Christians have been taught to avoid close friendships or even business partnerships with non-Christians. We have learned to “come out from them and be separate” in every area of life.

This problem has been made far worse by the culture war engulfing our society. There is an intense conflict taking place in our communities, in our schools, in the media, and even in the courts and in the corridors of power about what way of life will govern our culture.

An appropriate response to our dilemma might be repentance for the failure of Christians to be more involved in the political process at the local and national level over the past few generations. Of course those who have worked to undermine the hold of God’s moral law over the consciences and lives of Americans will have to bear their own load before God. But we, as the Church of Christ, bear a far greater responsibility for the present situation, and must examine our own failure to be salt and light in the public square for several generations. We were given more and yet we failed to be faithful in holding fast to that which was good. We have failed to serve our communities with the gift of God’s moral law.

We ought to be involved in the culture war, but we must join this war with an attitude of humility and repentance, with words of grace, and not with crude jokes, name calling, and abuse. We are, as Francis Schaeffer used to say, “to do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way,” not in the way the world does its work.

In addition to condemnation, many believers are also characterized by separation and retreat. We retire into the haven of the church for our own protection and for the protection of our children. This makes genuine outreach almost impossible. A friend who is not yet a believer put it this way: “The trouble with you Christians is that you wrap yourselves in a cocoon. All your close friends are other Christians. What about pagans like me? Who will reach me?”

My friend’s observations are too valid for comfort. How can we have true communication with people about a Gospel of love and the Word made flesh if we distance ourselves from those who need to hear the message?

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