

Reaching Secular America

by Doug Hamilton

Part 2

In the first part of this two part series on Reaching Secular America, we emphasized some of the reasons why America is turning more and more secular. Some of the reasons are not within our realm of influence, but some of them are fully within our realm. As the people of God, we must NOT...

- 1) Put Brand Name Ahead of Christ's Name
- 2) Put Tradition Ahead of Applicability
- 3) Put Hypocrisy Ahead of Practice
- 4) Put Subjectivity Ahead of Objectivity

If we have met that challenge, there is still the need to be prepared to lead them to Christ. Jesus died for them just like He died for us. We must not give up on anyone before we give it a chance. Here are four suggestions to consider in reaching out to the secular soul.

1) Accurate Perceptions

Just because someone is secular and unaffiliated to a church family, it does not mean that they are bad people. There is a group of radical secularists that tend to leave a bad taste in our mouth. If we are not careful, we could end up lumping all secularists in the same category. Most are very similar to us.

- Secular people go to the grocery store and buy food, pay bills, struggle with mortgages and work jobs just like Christians.
- Secular individuals love their children like Christian parents love their children.
- Secular people like to have people over to their homes just like Christians do.
- Secular people hurt when someone in their family is ill just like Christians hurt to see a loved one suffer.
- Secular people all have a beautiful soul that Jesus loves just like we have a beautiful soul (*1 Tim 2:4...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*).
- In fact many secular people seek after the spiritual just like us.

A recent survey, of the secular who are unaffiliated with a church, 5% attend a worship service one time a week, 22% attend monthly/yearly and 72% seldom/never (Pew Research Survey 2012). In other words nearly 30% of the secular that are not affiliated with a church still attend regularly or occasionally. Of the same group 68% believe in God or a universal spirit and 41% pray to God daily/weekly/monthly. In the same survey 55% of the unaffiliated said they considered themselves to be religious or spiritual. It is safe to say that at least one third of all secular people are spiritual to some degree.

Why is that important? For every three people that claim to be atheist or agnostic, one of them is likely a spiritual person by their own admission. It kind of changes the way we look at people, doesn't it? Perhaps we would more likely reach out to them if we extended that courtesy to all people who say they are secular. That is millions of people that we could end up using the process that Paul used in Acts 17. We could start with where they are and assist them in where they need to go. *Acts 17:23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your*

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worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

2) Working Relationships

Jesus said in Matthew 5:41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two." In the scribal law, the leaders taught that on the Sabbath a Jew could only walk 9/10th of a mile. Anything beyond that would be a violation of the Law. Roman soldiers would travel through Jerusalem with the gear and compel the Jews to break the scribal law by walking a whole mile. This drove them crazy. Jesus was telling His followers when the Roman soldiers tempt you to break the scribal law, go with him two miles. Perhaps in that extra time the hauler might be able to be a positive influence on the soldier. Sometimes the people that God puts in our life are for the good of both us and them.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

This is a true fact for nearly all people: If we are ever going to speak to them about something important, you must be important to them first. This importance is built upon the relationships that are fostered with them. The Christian naturally tends to want to spend time with other Christians. We must however take the time to have relationships with some of the secular if we ever expect to reach them. They tend to be skeptics and without a good relationship, they will not advance the discussion of God. They will listen if you have the type of relationship that puts them in the position. We must have working relationships with the secular if we plan to reach them.

3) Meaningful Works

Jesus said in *Matthew 5:16* "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." The light that He was referring to was the good works that we can do in the name of Christ. It is true that Christians are expected by God to do good works.

- 1 Peter 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.
- Philippians 2:15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,
- 1 Pet 2:15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

A large part of Christianity is the need to come to the need of others in the time of their need. Deep down inside Christians understand that faith without works is dead.

- James 2:14-17 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of

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daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

An interesting blog titled Secular volunteering opportunities? said the following:

"I have an Ethics assignment that requires me to volunteer and write a paper on my experience, but I would rather my volunteering not be mixed with religious dogma. Any ideas?"

It is interesting to note the following points from this blog:

- A. He is being compelled to volunteer as an assignment. The school recognized the need to learn community service as a viable lesson of life. Even among the secular there is a need to reach out and help our fellow man.
- B. He is associating volunteer work with religion. He obviously has made the association of good works and Christianity. Do the secular expect Christians to do good works? If so, then could they also recognize the value of doing good works in society? Of course.
- C. He refers to "religious dogma". Apparently he believes that the works that Christians do often reinforces their faith. He might have even struggled with the reconciliation of his secularism and the true basis of religion, that which is primarily spiritual and secondary physical. The religious dogma statement might even indicate a past strong armed lesson of the past at the beckoning of an overzealous disciple.

If we will not take the time to have good works that make a difference in the lives of others, then we will not be living up to the standards of our God, ourselves and even the secular of the world.

4) Logical Teaching

As mentioned before, many secular individuals consider themselves skeptics. They do not want to hear of your emotional-based arguments that make them feel that they must abandon reason to accept there is a God. Whenever you hear from the mouths of Christians "I know in my heart..." or "I feel...", we run the risk of losing the discussion from the start. Granted there are skeptics that also base things on ignorance, but they tend to be agnostics rather than atheists. Either way the strategy is the same. They must see your faith as logical. There are three questions that every logical person on earth will struggle with: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where do I go when I die?

A. Discuss the logic of accepting Intelligent Design. (Where did I come from?)

The Bible is clear concerning that God created the heavens and the earth as the basis of our faith. Without this in the formula there can be no salvation. We must be able to share this side of perspective before moving on. Without believing there is a Creator a person can never have the faith which saves.

- Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

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- Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.
- Job 12:7-10 “But now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; And the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you. 8 “Or speak to the earth, and let it teach you; And let the fish of the sea declare to you. 9 “Who among all these does not know That the hand of the LORD has done this, 10 In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?”
- Psalm 139:14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

If they will not reason that the evidence indicates Intelligent Design, then there is nothing more that can be shared at that time. How can they be saved if the evidence in the mirror is dismissed and left to random chance of the Big Bang and Evolution.

B. Discuss the logic of having purpose and meaning to our lives. (Why am I here?)

Humans, even those who are secular, want to know that they have meaning to their lives. Once they understand the plausibility of a Creator, they must be shown the God from the Bible and the plans He has for us. The plan is revealed in the beginning.

Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

In what way were we made in the likeness and image of God? An image is a reflection of someone or something. In Matthew 22:18-21, Jesus asked for a coin from the Pharisees and questioned “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” On that coin was the image of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. It looked like him because it was made in the likeness and image of Tiberius.

Who was the true image of God?

- We are told in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Jesus is the image of God.
- Colossians 1:15 refers to Jesus as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
- Hebrews 1:3 states that Jesus *"is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature"*.
- To agree with Jesus in John 14:9 "He who has seen Me has seen the Father".

Jesus was caring, pure, righteous and perfect in every way as the Father. Jesus shined the glory of God in His life in every way. He is the exact image of God. He is our model and our leader of the mission.

Shine Jesus shine Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit blaze, Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river flow Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word, Lord and let there be light.

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We were made by God to reflect the image of His Son's holiness. We are to be lights of God, living for and serving daily for Him. The problem is that just like Adam and Eve we fall short of the glory of God. Our sins separate us from God, for in Him there is no darkness at all. That leads to the third part.

C. Discuss the logic of salvation (Where do I go when I die?)

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus came to live the perfect life, die the perfect death and be raised in the perfect resurrection. He wants to forgive us of our sins, our downfalls and our moral weaknesses so that we can be with Him forever in heaven. If we allow Jesus to cleanse us from our sins, to wash us clean with His sacrificial blood and reconcile us to the Father, we will be presented faultless before the presence of God's exceeding glory.

Conclusion:

We must have a well thought out plan when it comes to reaching out to the secular souls of America. I hope and pray that the suggestions that were discussed in this lesson assist you in some way. We must have...

- 1) Accurate Perceptions
- 2) Working Relationships
- 3) Meaningful Works
- 4) Logical Teaching