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Has Apologetics Had a Positive Effect on Our Culture?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether apologetics has had a positive effect on people and our culture, whether the longtime privatization of our Christian faith has led to churches becoming apathetic to the culture, and C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer book recommendations.

- * Do you believe apologetics has had a positive effect on people and our culture?
- * Has the longtime privatization of our Christian faith led to local churches becoming apathetic to the surrounding culture, and if so, what is the solution?
- * What top two books by C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer would you recommend for getting started with each one?

Transcript

You're listening to Amy Hall and Greg Cocoa on the hashtag S-T-R-S podcast from Stand to Reason. Hello, Greg. Hey, you always get top billing.

I'll switch it up next time. All right. Check in.

All right, here's a question from Garrett. Do you believe apologetics has had a positive effect on people and their culture? Right and wrong don't exist anymore. Well, he's identifying, Garrett, you're identifying a problem about the decay of the commitment to objective morality.

But the question really is about the impact of apologetics. And the apologetics has increased since impact in the last 30 years. This is my observation.

It's not a problem. And it's not just because of Stand to Reason's role. There's a lot of other organizations that have had an impact there and the impact in training, what I have referred to as the third column, which are all those people that are affected by what we do corporately here with our colleagues in the broader apologetic community.

And these people are making an impact in their local communities. That means more

people are understanding the truth about Christianity and about, in this case, objective morality. And therefore, it's a much better situation now than it was 30 years ago.

Now, let me back up and put it this way. It's a much better situation now than it would have been had we not had the impact that we've had over the last 30 years, we being the broader apologetics community. Now, I think that the culture itself has gone down.

So the net effect is a loss in the culture. But it would have been worse if there weren't apologetics. So the answer to the question is apologetics having an impact? The answer is definitely yes.

Many, many more people are convinced of the truth of Christianity and the truth of the Christian worldview. And subsequently, that affects their lives and lives of others around them. And it would be, we'd be in a much worse state if it were not for the Christian apologetics.

And we know this just because of the letters that we get and the calls that we get and the way people talk to us at events like realities and other individual events that our team speaks at. And they tell us the powerful impact standard reason and apologetics in general have had on their own lives and on the lives of those people close to them that they were able to affect. So the answer is yes, it's having an impact.

It doesn't mean that apologetics is the panacea, the thing that will cure the world's ills, but it's one of the ways that we are salt and light to our culture. Yeah, I think for so long Christians were coasting because as long as the culture around them agreed with everything Christians believed, they didn't have to think about why they believed it. And they didn't have to argue for it and they didn't have to respond to challenges to it.

And so I think we're, we started kind of behind. But I definitely know there are so many more people now who know how to think about what they believe and reach out to people and start groups and are strengthening Christians all over the place. And so it's definitely having an impact on them for sure.

I mean, just look at, look at all of the speakers and the podcasts and the YouTube channels. Yeah, it's so different from when I started, I don't know, 20 years ago, back when Biola first started, it's apologetics degree, things were very different. There was the Bible answer, man.

And that was about it. If you wanted to look for apologetics resources, you went to see us Lewis. Are you listen to the Bible answer, man? There wasn't a whole lot more beyond that.

And when we think about all the riches that we have now, it just, it blows my mind. Yeah. How, how much better off we are now.

As Christians, as you say, the culture may not be better off now, but as Christians, we are better off now and we're better positioned to make a difference. Okay, let's go on to question from Ken Black. Ken.

Ken. I think that the privatization of our Christian faith amongst believers going back many years has led local churches to become apathetic to the surrounding culture. Please share your opinion of this statement and the solution you think will overcome apathetic congregations.

Well, it's, it's always difficult. It's tempting, but I have to confess a difficulty to make generalizations about the local church. Because here we are doing what we do.

We're sitting behind microphones and we are occasionally traveling to other churches who, with whom we have kindred spirits because that's why they asked us to come and speak. And the places that we go to, obviously, are not apathetic. The churches that I'm in, I see a lot of activities that are involved in the community.

I mean, it's, it's hard not to be a committed Christian church, I think, nowadays, and not take into consideration the needs of those in our community. First of all, it's a biblical imperative. Secondly, it's a cultural imperative.

This is what everybody's talking about. So even if it's just a matter of picking up on cultural momentum we're carried along, we realize, oh, we have to participate. We have to do something in the community.

We have to help out where we can. And in fact, I think churches are doing that all over the place. Now, are there some churches that aren't doing anything, but they're in there a little, my, my disciple or first disciple used to call a smot, a secret meeting of the saints.

You know, they're all smotzing up and doing their little thing together and, well, I guess there are people like that. But I don't think it's characteristic of churches that they're not involved in their communities. I, in fact, I think that if anything taken the church at large, that being involved in the community is, is so important to them that sometimes the broader concern, which is the necessity of making the case for the gospel.

And the truth is some sometimes takes the back seat. Here are the things that people are doing. I, I went to, well, I probably shouldn't even use this as an illustration because I don't know anything, especially about this particular church, but it was just an enterprise.

I had an opportunity to expose to that was a magnificent thing and I benefited from it, but it was a result of their Christian outreach. But my understanding of the denomination is that there weren't that concern about the gospel. Now, I could have been mistaken about that particular church, but anyway, we do see a lot of that.

I guess I, I guess I don't agree in general from what I've been able to see that I think the church is not concerned about those things happening in the community. I don't see how they can not be that and still be viable churches in their community. And if anything, it's gone the other direction.

Now, we're talking in generalizations now, so there are always going to be exceptions to either side on this, but, but I think that there is a perception that is largely from the media that Christians don't care. You know, we don't care. It's the left that cares and the left, of course, trying to get the government to care for the left, basically, with the government's money taken from others, doing what Christians ought to be doing directly.

But I see Christians doing this all these good things all the time. And so I guess I don't, from my position of observation, I do not concur with that point, at least taken at face value. I think if you're this idea of the privatization of our Christian faith, I think what's entailed in that is the idea that that we've kind of soaked in from our culture of a relativistic view of religion.

So if that's the problem in your church, then I think that does lead to people not reaching out to others and telling them the gospel and not trying to make a case for the truth or argue against things that are wrong, because there's this relativistic idea in the back of their minds. So if that's happening in your church and it's leading to apathy, I think there are two things that would help this. And the first thing is you have to convince them that Christianity is true.

Not in the sense that you like it, but it's actually true to reality and the things that are opposed to Christianity are actually false. This might take some time to sink in because it's contrary to everything the culture is telling us about religion. Religion is just, it's in a completely different category from whether or not there's a truck coming down the street.

It's just what you like, it's your preference. What's true for me is not true for you, that sort of thing. So the first thing you have to do is convince them it's true.

The second thing you have to do is you have to get them out interacting with people who do not have our Christian beliefs, because it's very easy for us to get involved in our Christian groups and to only be involved with Christians and you forget how much the world needs Jesus. You forget because you get used to it. You get used to knowing God in his grace and his comfort and all these things that we have, we start to take them for granted.

But I promise you, as soon as you start getting involved in the lives of people who are outside of Christianity, you will start to understand their need for God, their need for salvation. So I think if you put those two things together, you would have to actively

work to move people out and maybe challenge them. Hey, we're going to have a group, bring a friend who is not a Christian and let's just talk about these different issues and let's get an idea of what other people believe about these things.

And I guarantee you, once people start getting challenged on their faith, that is when they'll stop being empathetic. And sometimes that's all you really need, but you have to be intentional about that and try and find specific ways to bring people in to challenge your congregation. That's great.

I like the distinction you made earlier in privatization that could be privatization of our convictions that Christianity is true and therefore not advancing that because we're subjectivistic even about our own views. Well, this is our view that's true for us, not necessarily true for the world because we've absorbed this cultural ethic as opposed to then the more, the privatization in terms of addressing cultural concerns or the needs of the culture. And my point was that I see less concern about that because I do see even those who are not what we would consider genuine followers of Christ, not holding classical Christianity, or that Christianity is true in the sense that we're just discussing it still being involved in the social enterprises because they think that's really what it's all about.

Look at the Progressive Church. They've abandoned almost all of the theological foundations, but they think that social justice is the, that's redemption. And so they're involved in that.

So I think there is that. And so there's a twofold. There's a privatization of personal conviction and therefore not arguing for the truth.

But there's also, I don't think there's as much privatization of our ethical responsibilities to the culture. I think that's, that's being addressed largely. Okay, let's go to a question from Jim in South Carolina.

You often refer to C.S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer. What would be your top two books to get started with each one? And look at the top book. And lately, Lee Strobel's been muscling out.

C.S. Lewis, but Lee's been writing for what? 15 or 20 years and Lewis wrote 70 years ago. Okay. So, Muir Christian, I think came out in 1952 or 53, something like that.

And the material was from almost a decade earlier. So Lewis has been on the top with that book for a long time and it has a track record. Chuck Holson became a Christian through Muir Christianity, for example.

And so many others are deeply influenced. And I just listened, as I was driving to Palm Springs and back for an event last weekend. I listened to a Brett reading Muir Christianity and I listened in three or four chapters at the beginning.

It's virtually flawless. At least those portions. I disagree with some things later in the book.

But nevertheless, it's so superbly argued. And he's making the moral case for the existence of God. It's the moral argument that he does there so well.

And he trades on the kinds of intuitions of the common sense, moral common sense that we talk about here a lot. So, I think Muir Christianity is the place to start. That book changed the way I look at Christianity.

That was the first book I read where I thought, Oh, wait, this can actually be true. That was the moment for me. So I agree with that one.

Go ahead. So I actually had that thought reading Shafer. Shafer wrote three seminal works.

The God who is there, he is there and he is not silent and escape from reason. Okay, these are more difficult books than Lewis's. So if you have trouble with Lewis, I'm just saying you're going to have to work harder for Shafer.

But Shafer is very accessible. He's just a little bit more overtly philosophical. And so, but I think those books were the ones that really gave me that aha moment after I became a believer.

I was at the Leighton Powerhouse, you know, this Christian community. Maybe that's a better word to use. In Westwood Village in 1974, I think is when I started reading.

I moved in in February, 74, and that spring is when I started reading Francis Shafer. And I just devoured those first three books. I wish I had my originals.

I don't know where they are. How I can part with some of these books over time. I don't know how it happened.

I do have some of that material from that time. I have Oz Guinness's Dust of Death that I read back then when he was just a young chap. But in any event, Oz Guinness is also a disciple of Shafer along with Nancy Pearsy and many others.

But those three books so profoundly informed my understanding of particulars of the Christian worldview and the nature. I'm not even sure how to explain it, but it helped me to position my mind in a very particular way in addressing the world. So it was Shafer that said that all human beings are made the image of God and they must live in the world that God made.

Now, this provides common ground for us. We have something we can speak to any human being in any generation, in any circumstance, in any culture. These are foundational factors.

This really expanded my understanding. And then it was also the philosophical elements that were the necessities. So in *Escape From Reason*, he's got the epistemological necessity, the moral necessity, the metaphysical necessity.

These are chapters in there about how God is necessary to make sense of the world as we find it. Or even to know anything, epistemological necessity. And these were the things that really formed a foundation for me philosophically.

A first introduction to any of those terms for me at all. I'd never had any background in any of that stuff, but it really built a solid foundation. Now those three books, the *God who is there*, *he is there* and *he is not silent* and *escape from reason*.

These are all now under a single volume. I think it's called the Shafer Trilogy or something like that and it's published by Crossway. So you can get an individual volume, but it's just worth the work.

It's worth the work. I mentioned a little earlier, I think, in this broadcast from the lower story to the upper story. That's Shaferian language.

He's got a model of a two-story house and he's trying to explain how facts of the world that our religious claims go from the lower story where things you can know to the upper story where you can't know, you can only take a leap out the window, a leap of faith, so to speak. And how many things are getting pushed up there. Now what we've seen over the years, and Shafer died in the late 80s.

But what we've seen over the years is that more and more is being pushed into the upper story. More and more is just a matter of subjective opinion and not a matter of objective truth. I mean this is the whole postmodern element that has seeped in.

The fact that you can't know religious truth, that's from the enlightenment. That's modernism. But that you can't know other kinds of truth.

That's postmodernism and there's one's a reaction to the other. Now Shafer is writing in a modernistic world circumstance and he's addressing that, but nevertheless the kinds of tools that I took from Shafer. In those books are things that stand me in good stead, dealing with a host of things because it provided tremendous foundation for me.

Now he is not a presuppositionalist, though he was schooled under the father of presuppositionalism as a Cornelius ventii. But he rejected a lot of what ventii taught. And I would consider Shafer to be now like myself, maybe under his influence, as an evidentialist who is sensitive to the role of presuppositions.

I'm realizing as you're talking that I got something wrong earlier in this podcast because I said, you know, 30 years ago, you know, 20 years ago, you'd listen to the Bible answer man or you'd read mere Christianity. But in fact, Francis Shafer came before that time

and he actually started a huge movement. We think about Nancy Piersi and you and Oz Guinness and all the people that came out of his ministry.

Yes, where he started looking at culture and examining culture in light of the Christian worldview. And he really probably started the most recent movement of apologetics. Well, he was one of the principal players.

John Montgomery was there too and Norm Geysler, of course, was writing in Walter Martin. Walter Martin had a radio show. He focused in on aberrant Christian movements principally, but nevertheless he was one of those voices.

Josh McDowell was also in play there too, but he was a traveler, traveling speaker and writer. But Walter was somebody you could actually listen to. But not only that, there was a powerful impact that Shafer had in the pro-life movement.

Because he began writing about the pro-life issue in the 80s in very, very significant terms. How shall we then live was one of his books and had a really provided a powerful philosophical foundation for that particular movement as well. So these are people that have had a great impact.

Yeah, I was going to suggest if you wanted to start with something shorter than those three, how should we then live? Or Christian Manifesto, those would also give you kind of an entrance into his work. Yeah, those focus on different issues and it's built on the prior structure. Right, right.

I would say that the prior structure comes to those three works. Yes, definitely, definitely. Christian Manifesto is about the rule of love, and this is what Christians are supposed to display to make a difference in the world, which is good.

It's a smaller book. Yeah, but if you just wanted to get your feet wet before you stepped into the war. And of course, Nancy Piersi was really influenced by his ideas.

So Total Truth is along the same lines as the kind of thing he wrote. And St. Leonardo and all of her books reflect his influence. But what about a second? I have a second suggestion for C.S. Lewis, and it's my favorite one, and it's called The Great Divorce.

It's not a very long book, but it reveals his understanding of human beings and what keeps them away from God and how we think about religion. It's just a wonderful little book, and so many people have never read it. So if you're someone who listens to audiobooks, there's a version where Julie and Ryan Tuttle reads it, and it's fantastic.

It's only a few hours long, so anyone could read it. Well, I said you added one. Let me add two more.

And just in terms of popularity, his scoot tape letters was one of his most popular pieces,

and I think it came out before mere Christianity. It came out in the late 40s, and this is kind of the view of the world from a demon's perspective who is discipling a junior demon how to make Christians in effectual. And there's a lot of wisdom in there.

And then I would also recommend this as an easy peasy, right? This is the Chronicles of Narnia. And the reason I like the Chronicles is because there are all kinds of very practical notions about Christian living, and especially about the issue of sanctification that are embedded in these stories. And if you're an alert reader, you can't miss them.

They're just all over. And Lewis mentioned about writing them for children, and then he says, after you lose interest, then you grow older, then you'll be interested in those books again. And I think there's a lot for adults in those books, and there are lots of fun.

Yeah, I think you're right. The absolute core of CS Lewis, if you have to pick two, you probably would have to go with mere Christianity and screw tape letters. But I had to throw my paper.

There's so much good stuff. And you're so unbelievably prolific. Yes, yeah.

But he just understood human beings so well, not just how, not just the Christian worldview and what it means and why it's true, but who we are and how we react to our own sin, to temptation, to God, all these things. He was just what an amazing person he was. Well, partly because he wasn't a modernist.

After he abandoned his atheism and his agnosticism, I mean, he's a classicist. He is a medieval. You know, he was all completely fellow reading another biography of him right now, and how, even when he was, you know, 23 years old, how he was proficient in all these languages and had read everything under the sun that had to do with this.

This period and all of these, he was steeped in this way of understanding the nature of the world, and then he finally found a worldview that actually made sense of it all, which is, which is very curious. We've talked about this before. It's Christianity that is the best explanation for the way things are.

And he was discovering through these a clear take, getting a clear take on the way things are without being muddled by a modernist view when subsequently postmodernists that was asked after his time really. But rather in this worldview that saw the beauty of the world and the nobility of the world and chivalry and all of those things that were good and noble about human beings, but also the ugliness too. And now he then discovered the worldview that made sense of it all.

And it's amazing. I mean, I think about his other fiction, his space trilogy. It's amazing how far he saw ahead of what was coming and why.

And we were just so, God bless us with those two men. That's right. So thank you, Lord,

for both of them.

And continues to do so. So if you haven't read them yet, you need to go out and pick one of these books we've talked about. Thank you so much for listening.

If you have a question, you can send it on X with the hashtag STRS or go to our website at str.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cockel for Stand to Reason.