

Scandals, Secrecy and Declassifying the Gospel

The scandals currently engulfing the Internal Revenue Service, the National Security Agency (NSA), the Justice Department and other government agencies have something in common: information.

Who has certain information, and for what purpose? How should they be able to obtain it? What should they know, and when should they know it? And so on. “Big Data” offers enormous power to those with the resources to gather, analyze and use it for good or ill. The challenge for free societies is to harness Big Data without allowing governments or corporations to become Big Brothers and manipulators.

Secrecy is another common element in the latest scandals. Public officials at every level of government, regardless of political affiliation, seem to have a compulsive need to classify information—regardless of its sensitivity.

They’re not the only offenders. Questionable secrecy is common in the business world. Bureaucrats and managers who regard knowledge as power withhold important information from underlings who need it to do their jobs. It only hurts the companies they work for, but it’s almost impossible to eliminate. Why? Human nature. People love secrets.

But there’s a secrecy—or silence, to put it more accurately—that’s much worse than the bureaucratic brand. It has potentially eternal consequences, and it’s practiced consciously or unconsciously by many folks who claim to follow Christ. We have the most important information there is: Jesus is Lord and Savior of the world. But we don’t tell others He is the way, the truth and the life.

You can come up with any number of rationalizations. You

aren't good at one-on-one evangelism. It's not your "gift." You're a sinner, so you don't have the right to tell somebody else what to believe or how to live. You aren't ready when the opportunity comes. The people you need to tell aren't ready to hear it. They don't want to hear it. They will reject you if you say something. Old-school evangelistic methods don't work anymore. Blah, blah, blah. I've used 'em all. Still do from time to time.

These are excuses, not reasons. Yes, you need to live the gospel in order to share it effectively. But that doesn't mean you wait until you have eliminated all sin from your life to tell others how to find forgiveness. That day will never come. The real reasons we don't tell everyone we know about the Good News of Jesus boil down to three: We're afraid of the reaction we might get, we don't care enough about others to tell them, or we don't really believe Jesus is the only way to salvation. That last one is the heart of the matter. Unbelief and disobedience usually go hand in hand.

Larry Alex Taunton, an author and commentator who directs the Fixed Point Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to the public defense of Christianity, has debated many prominent atheists. In an excellent article for *The Atlantic* magazine, "Listening to Young Atheists: Lessons for a Stronger Christianity," he reported on a project carried out by Fixed Point to interview members of college atheist organizations about their "journey to unbelief."

Taunton expected the young nonbelievers to cite science, rationality, logic or the conflicting claims of major faiths as the sources of their rejection of religion in general and Christianity in particular. Many did so. But he was surprised by how many had grown up in church and left the fold—not because they felt it was oppressive or fanatical, but because they found it superficial and disconnected from its biblical origins.

“These students heard plenty of messages encouraging ‘social justice,’ community involvement, and ‘being good,’ but they seldom saw the relationship between that message, Jesus Christ, and the Bible,” Taunton reports. “Listen to Stephanie, a student at Northwestern: ‘The connection between Jesus and a person’s life was not clear.’ This is an incisive critique. She seems to have intuitively understood that the church does not exist simply to address social ills, but to proclaim the teachings of its founder, Jesus Christ, and their relevance to the world. Since Stephanie did not see that connection, she saw little incentive to stay.”

They also expressed respect for, if not agreement with, Christians who “unashamedly embraced biblical teaching.”

“I really can’t consider a Christian a good, moral person if he isn’t trying to convert me,” stated Michael, a political science major at Dartmouth.

According to Taunton, “This sentiment is not as unusual as you might think. It finds resonance in the well-publicized comments of Penn Jillette, the atheist illusionist and comedian: ‘I don’t respect [believers] who don’t proselytize. ... If you believe that there’s a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. ... How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?’”

Good question. Believers in many places are willing to put their lives on the line to tell others about the eternal truth they have found. We’re hesitant to share it because it might make someone else (or us) uncomfortable. Our hesitance is hastening our own society’s destruction—and helps explain our half-hearted participation in taking the gospel to all nations.

If you don't have the compulsion to tell others that Jesus is Lord, do you really believe it yourself?

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