THE HUMAN RIGHT

to know Jesus Christ
& to make Him known

Rice Broocks
Bestselling Author of God’s Not Dead
"There is a lot of talk today about human rights and social justice. Yet few people consider which worldview best accounts for these. In *The Human Right*, Rice Broocks convincingly argues that the Christian worldview makes the most sense of our cry for justice and reconciliation. In other words, the gospel is the only hope we have for human rights and dignity. And this book can help you apply this truth to make a lasting difference."

—Sean McDowell, PhD
Biola University apologetics professor, international speaker, and bestselling coauthor, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

"Rice Broocks rightly emphasizes that whether Christ is true is an eternal life and death matter—yet people have no opportunity to make a free choice of faith unless we give them the opportunity (Romans 10:14). He also rightly emphasizes the gospel’s concern for justice and its power to bring social transformation. May we heed this message because there is no apologetic for the gospel greater than the lives of those transformed by it."

—Dr. Craig S. Keener
Asbury Seminary professor and New Testament commentary author, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*

"I strongly encourage seekers of truth and followers of Jesus to read *The Human Right*. It’s a powerful and readable defense of the validity of the Christian faith. Witnessing involves sharing our faith, but it also involves giving a reason for the hope that we have. *The Human Right* honestly tackles the objections to Christian faith and answers those objections."

—Dr. George Wood
Chairman, World Assemblies of God Fellowship
“In a world where everyone is claiming a right to something, Rice Broocks shoots up this literary flare to highlight the most important right every human being has: to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. In The Human Right he shows how you can help solve injustice now and for eternity. There’s little more exciting and fulfilling than that!”

—Dr. Frank Turek
Coauthor, I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist; CrossExamined.org

“If our ‘right to life’ is critically important, how much more important is our ‘right to eternal life’? Dr. Rice Broocks addresses this timely issue in The Human Right: To Know Jesus Christ and to Make Him Known. In this book, which expresses his heart for evangelism, Rice examines the power of the gospel to explain reality, address our deepest needs, and change the course of human history.”

—J. Warner Wallace
Cold-case detective, Colson Center for Christian Worldview senior fellow, Biola University apologetics adjunct professor, and author, Cold-Case Christianity

“The infectious enthusiasm for justice and truth in The Human Right comes from Rice Broocks’s passion for God. Rice is a storyteller, thinker, activist, author, and strategist, but, most of all, he is a follower of Jesus with a relentless desire to help people find the grace that he has received. Read this book if you want an accessible, engaging account of the Christian faith and its call to engage with the biggest challenges facing our world.”

—Dr. Krish Kandiah
Founder, Home for Good, UK; and author, God Is Stranger: Finding God in Unexpected Places

“I love these books that Rice has written that are helping believers defend their faith in an age of skepticism. The Human Right is his best work yet. He puts forth the most compelling case I’ve ever read that the gospel should be heard by everyone everywhere!”

—Stormie Omartian, Bestselling author, Power of a Praying Series
“In our post-truth culture, truth seems evasive or untenable to the masses. However, Rice Broocks, in *The Human Right*, has cleared the fog and brought a clarifying work that points to the only anchor of truth, hope, and justice: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each chapter brings convincing and compelling truth that was born in real-life conversations Dr. Broocks has had with thousands of students and leaders around the world. It would be difficult to find anyone more gifted or qualified to bring forth these truths in a language that can be understood by all.”

—Ron Lewis
Every Nation NYC senior minister

“Justice and compassion are at the forefront of most conversations in society’s spheres—especially with students and young adults. The beauty of the gospel is its ability to translate God into the dialect of each sphere. Dr. Broocks is not only a leading expert in this arena but also a close friend. I highly recommend *The Human Right* to anyone who seeks proven language from a proven leader on this timeless subject.”

—Heath Adamson
Chairman, World Assemblies of God Fellowship (Next Gen)
THE HUMAN RIGHT
TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST
& TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

Rice Broocks
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The Revolution We Need

In the summer of 1984, I had a front row seat to an actual revolution taking place in the Philippines. “People Power” was being unleashed against the government’s massive corruption and human rights violations. Thousands of students marched in the streets and demanded the president step down. The passion of the protestors felt like one of the typhoons that regularly smash the island-chain nation.

I was in the Philippines to conduct a monthlong Christian outreach to university students. With me were my wife, Jody; our three-month-old child; my friend and former college roommate Steve Murrell and his wife, Deborah; and sixty students from the United States and Canada.

Steve and I sat in a small coffee shop in Manila and drew a five-mile-radius circle on a map of the city where some three hundred thousand students lived. It was called the U-Belt. This would be the target area for our efforts. Our team met daily with the students on campus and in the streets, sharing our testimonies.
about a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ; nightly, we hosted larger rallies, where the gospel was presented. At times during our nightly meetings, students could be seen weeping—not because of our powerful speaking ability, but because of the tear gas wafting into the basement auditorium from the riotous street protests right outside our building.

We also received some pushback from people who felt we were trying to distract the protestors from bringing an end to the nation’s rampant political and social injustices. After all, they argued, the nation had a very long, deep religious heritage. If religion were an effective agent for justice, it would have succeeded long ago.

Despite the obstacles, the truth we presented slowly sank in. “Political change has its limits,” we told them over and over again. If you change only the government and not the hearts of the people, the problems will continue to multiply, and disillusionment and cynicism will surely set in. The idealists who lead the revolution will simply become a new, ossified establishment. By contrast, the gospel of Christ offers a peaceful revolution of the heart. By changing the hearts of people, it deals with injustice at its true source.

Hundreds of students responded to the call to follow Christ that summer. From that larger group, a core of believers was formed and has since grown into a Christian fellowship called Victory, which on any given weekend attracts more than eighty thousand worshippers in more than thirty locations throughout metro Manila.

It is also the flagship church of a global network of churches and ministries called Every Nation—a formidable force for good, helping the needy, reaching out to students with the
gospel, building churches, speaking the truth to those in power, and reminding leaders at all levels of society to serve the people and lead with integrity.

Ferdie Cabiling, one of the Filipino students who came to Christ during that original outreach more than thirty years ago, now serves as the senior leader of Victory in Manila. His life was turned around because of the gospel’s revolutionary message: radical change happens when you make Jesus Christ your Lord. Many years later he told me something I’ll never forget, which is at the center of this book’s message: “What you were preaching was not the revolution we wanted,” he said, “but it was the revolution we needed.”

The News Everyone Deserves to Hear

Hearing and believing the gospel radically changed my own life when I was a third-year student at Mississippi State University. A fellow classmate told me about the God of the universe who became man in Jesus Christ and died on a Roman cross to remove injustice (sin) from the world, including the sin and injustice in my very own heart. I learned the gospel was not a fairy tale. The events in the life and death of Jesus actually happened, and three days after His death, His tomb was found empty. The best explanation of these facts is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead—thus verifying His identity as the Son of God. His resurrection also affirmed the authority of His words in the Bible.

Ultimately these events changed history. Humanity was given the gift of hope, the assurance that evil would not have the last word, that virtually every wrong in the world could be rectified by transforming the human heart.
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Given all this, I submit that there can be no greater cause than telling others about these momentous historical events. Indeed, the central thesis of this book is that hearing the gospel is the ultimate human right because it alone has the power to destroy injustice at its very root, the human heart. The corollary would also be true that it is a human right to be able to tell others this all-important message.

To say we are in need of a spiritual revolution today is an understatement—particularly in America. Whether it’s because of racism, immorality, or terrorism perpetrated by misguided and maniacal religious fanatics, our world seems to be getting closer and closer to self-destructing. Yet, at precisely the time when the Christian church should be having a powerful impact on the culture, it seems to lack confidence in the promise of the gospel to subdue and eventually eradicate injustice and evil. Long forgotten are the past great awakenings, when the gospel produced lasting changes and helped mold our national character. Even the Jesus Movement of the 1960s is a faint memory to most. Worst of all, the challenge to today’s believers to share the message of Christ with others to affect the culture seems to fall on deaf ears.

Because of this—because the collective voices of people of faith seem so faint and uncertain—the masses are looking to other sources and agents of change to deal with the problem of human corruption and societal evil. Record numbers of young people under the age of thirty are dropping out of church or giving up their faith altogether. This demographic shows up in surveys as “nones”—people who are not necessarily atheists or agnostics but have no formal religious affiliation. Many nones see religion and other meta-narratives merely as cultural stories that transmit values, not as facts or true knowledge, so they feel completely free to take them or leave them.
Reaching out to nones was one of my primary concerns in writing the first two books in this series, *God’s Not Dead* and *Man, Myth, Messiah*—which inspired a God’s Not Dead series of movies. My working assumption has been that many nones do not practice Christianity simply because they doubt its message is really true.

This unbelief in the Bible’s veracity is accompanied by record levels of biblical illiteracy. Out of ignorance, nones and other skeptics caricature the Bible as a repressive, out-of-date book that promotes injustices, such as slavery, genocide, and intolerance. To these unbelievers, miracles are nothing more than myths.

These perceptions have contributed to the steady rise in agnosticism, atheism, and antitheism (so much for tolerance)—and to the misguided belief that only science and reason can save humanity. By refusing to take seriously any metaphysical truth about the material world, they leave us languishing in uncertainty and relativism.

That is why I’ve written this third book for those who are following Christ and seeking to share the gospel with others. You have a daunting challenge, given today’s record level of skepticism, and my aim is to help you evangelize in a way that is uniquely effective for our times—to help you explain to nonbelievers that the best solutions to our twenty-first-century problems are found in a collection of first-century documents.

The Gospel as Public Truth

In this book we look closely at the evidence for the Bible’s truthfulness and credibility. I take on today’s popular view that the gospel is merely a private truth—meaningful to our personal spiritual lives but not the kind of objective, factual truth that, say,
science or history offers. I argue that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a public truth, as factually true as stating \(2 \times 2 = 4\) or that America’s Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776.

Tragically this idea is as foreign to regular churchgoers as to the culture at large. Yet the gospel is rooted in historical claims that can be investigated and evaluated like any other claims. Scripture makes sure we don’t miss the importance of this point when it states, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Christianity is the only religion that places the entire weight of its truth on one historical event: the resurrection of Christ.

Unbelievers will naturally recoil at the idea that Christianity is a public truth, solidly based on objective, verifiable facts. The rise of postmodernism is partly a reaction to a lack of faith in the ability to know any real truth—especially in the area of metaphysical claims and belief systems. By suggesting all stories and cultural narratives are essentially equal, it keeps any one of them from gaining an advantage and thus control. The search for truth, therefore, is abandoned for the sake of tolerance.

Being a follower of Christ means not having to choose between the two as if they were mutually exclusive. Christians are instructed to show others genuine respect while defending the things we believe are true (1 Peter 3:15). Remember, God Himself gives every human being the right to make free choices, even the right to be wrong, and Christians are called to respect that.

Indeed, in the process of following Christ, we learn that truth is not just about being or living right; it’s about doing everything in the spirit of love—even for those who consider you their enemy. This charitable behavior is critical if we are to reverse the growing flight of young people from the Christian faith, an exodus that
happens after high school, when they enroll in a university. The widespread apostasy is the elephant in the room at almost every gathering of concerned Christian leaders these days. Because our Every Nation ministry focuses on university students around the world, we get weekly calls from Christian leaders, pastors, parents, and even the students themselves looking for some kind of antidote to help reverse this trend.

To everyone who calls or attends one of our meetings, our message is the same. The gospel is a public truth—*the most important of all public truths*, in fact—about which everyone everywhere has the right to know, because Christ Himself boldly stated, “I am the . . . truth” (John 14:6). He came not only to speak the truth but to model what it looks like in flesh and blood.

Truth, in other words, is not an abstract set of logical propositions; it’s a living person. *Knowing* Him is the only way an individual or an entire nation is liberated from the bondage of sin, corruption, and injustice.

### The Human Right Movement

I learned the phrase *Great Commission* very soon after becoming a Christian. It refers to Jesus commanding us to go into all the world with the gospel (Matthew 28:18–20). I also knew we were to help feed the poor and tend to the needy, to lead the fight against oppression and injustice with all our might. But there was a subtle separation in my mind between our efforts to stand against injustice on the one hand and the power of the gospel to actually end it on the other. Sadly, too many Christians believe they need to choose between fighting injustice and preaching the gospel. The
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typical thinking goes like this: one mission deals with problems that are of this world, while the other deals with people’s eternal destiny. The tension between the two missions has split believers for decades and is often the key demarcation between those who are theologically liberal and those who are conservative.

In this book I explain to you what I now realize: that the gospel is the only source of true freedom, and everyone in the world, has the right to hear it. It is the human right above all others. That’s why it is called “the human right.” This phrase is intended to capture the heart of a new generation to take the message of Christ to the ends of the earth. I have found that Christians today, especially those under thirty, are moved to action when they understand spreading the gospel as a human right and justice issue.

The human right doesn’t see the pair of missions as the horns of a dilemma. Rather, it sees proclaiming the gospel as requiring us to take on both missions. We must use words to communicate the good news but also back them up with actions that testify to the gospel’s truthfulness and power. It is not a “social gospel” but a message that has a dramatic impact on society.

At its core the human right declares that God not only cares about injustice but came to earth as Jesus Christ to deal with it personally. The death He suffered on the cross atoned for the sins of the world and created a new way for us to connect with God and thereby become new people. To be born again, as Jesus told the religious leader Nicodemus, is to receive the promise that the prophets of old had foretold: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26).
The human right gives top priority to the proclamation and practice of the gospel because the good news deals with injustice at its source: the human heart. When we present the gospel, we are calling every person first to repent and turn from evil (injustice) and then to pass the good news on to others. Just as injustice can spread like a virus, justice can spread as well. This change in our hearts produces the needed change in our character. It is impossible to be a follower of Christ and continue practicing injustice (sin) in any area of human activity.

To call Christ “Lord” means believing in His words and modeling them to the world around us. Trying to coerce people into believing the gospel is inconsistent with the very nature of the gospel, which offers true freedom. It is a freedom that gives every person the opportunity to reject the truth or embrace it.

In short, our greatest calling in life is to proclaim the truth and to support its claims with our lifestyles. As Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

To lack a sense of urgency in this calling is to evidence some doubt about its truth and therefore its power and primacy. This is why many have opted for social justice campaigns that have no reference to the gospel, substituting God’s truth for their own wisdom. Now is no time to perpetuate that catastrophic mistake.

Jesus Ends Injustice

A few months ago I made a return trip to Manila’s U-Belt to address a gathering of some five thousand students. Gone were the protestors, tear gas, anger, and hopelessness I had seen in the
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summer of 1984. Sadly, massive problems, such as poverty and crime, still exist, but something else is also very apparent. There is a rising force for justice and change at work, spearheaded in part by thousands of men and women whom our fledgling ministry reached more than thirty years ago. They’ve grown up to be authentic world changers, serving their country in almost every facet of society.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. Once planted, it grows up alongside the kingdom of darkness. The contrast is a constant reminder that injustice will not completely end until the final judgment day. It is toward that final reckoning we are all speeding.

Among those whom I addressed during my recent visit were student leaders from the nation’s leading colleges and universities. They are well acquainted with corruption, evil, and injustice, as they witness daily the many victims of that sinfulness. I spoke to the student leaders about the human right to see if the concept would have the same impact on them as it has had on me.

At the conclusion of my presentation—when I proclaimed, “Jesus ends injustice!”—the students exploded with thunderous applause, and a high-spirited celebration followed. They sang songs they had sung many times before, but with passion and, I believe, a greater sense of confidence and faith than ever before. In the coming months and years, it will be interesting to see if the gospel remains the best remedy for injustice in the Philippines. If it does, then there should be a dramatic rise in the number of Filipinos spreading the good news.

The world today seems to be a more dangerous place than ever before. To bring the gospel to every nation is a far riskier mission than it was when I started more than thirty-five years ago. More than sixty nations still have restrictions against anyone openly
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affirming Christianity. In more than thirty predominantly Muslim nations, an apostate can receive the death penalty for turning from Islam to Christianity. Now more than at any other time in history, Christians are being persecuted and martyred for their faith.

Nevertheless, the need for preaching the gospel to every ethnicity, generation, and gender has never been greater. With the rise of secularism and the spread of Islamic terrorism, I believe there must be a renewed dialogue about what is true. All people are created equal, but their beliefs and behaviors are not. Christ stated that He is the exclusive representative of the Creator (John 14:6). This should be taken seriously and not dismissed in the name of tolerance. Those of us who believe in the truthfulness of the gospel are called to walk in love and service to others, regardless of their own beliefs. Our purpose is to proclaim and practice the truth, not try to subjugate others.

My aim is to help you communicate the gospel with clarity as well as with the conviction of its truth. Above all, I provide you with reliable information and thought-provoking discussions that help drive home my core belief that hearing the gospel is a fundamental human right—arguably the most important right of all. And denying it to anyone is likewise the greatest injustice of all.
Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
—John 1:12

The worst oil spill in US history occurred on April 20, 2010, when a drilling platform exploded off the coast of Louisiana. The disaster known as the BP Oil spill resulted in more than two hundred thousand gallons of crude oil pouring into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico for more than eighty-seven straight days. Scientific American described the challenge as trying to cap an “oil volcano.” The task of stopping this unmitigated calamity was met with one failure after another as every attempt to cap the ongoing spill at its source failed. Even though it was officially stopped on
July 15, 2010, the damage to the environment was catastrophic. The company was ultimately found guilty of multiple charges and cited by the courts with “gross negligence and reckless conduct.”

The damage was difficult to tabulate and continues to be felt today. The flow of oil became a river of death that destroyed wildlife and marine life and altered the livelihoods of thousands of people. Its impact was eventually felt around the world. Images of oil-drenched pelicans and schools of dead fish filled the news and print media. The cost of the ecological disaster was estimated in the multiplied billions. Outside of trying to rescue wildlife helplessly struggling in the sludge, there was not much that could be done. The first and only rational response was to stop the flow of oil at its source—the blown-out rig. What a futile effort it would have been to try to clean up the damage from this spill and ignore the ongoing cause of the problem. Common sense tells you that the most important task was to focus on stopping the problem at its source.

Humanity continues to be its own worst enemy. As great as the damage was from this disaster, it is but one on the list of endless examples of loss and pain due to human error and sin. Nothing should be more obvious than that our world is broken and the results of our wayward behavior have been catastrophic in almost every way you can think. Evil and injustice seem to pour continuously into our world from every place, every city, and every nation. The list of atrocities grows daily—from genocide, human trafficking, exploitation of the poor, and oppression of women and children, to poverty and crime. The very thought of ending all the evil in the world is a dream that could happen in a fairy tale but not in real life.

Contrary to skeptical mockery, the existence of evil doesn’t point to God’s absence from the world. He is not unmoved by our
pain or ambiguous in what the remedy for the world’s needs is. But like the oil volcano, the problem can’t be fully addressed by just trying to manage the damage. In His wisdom, God foresaw the breakdown before the world was even created. His solution to the multifaceted, hydra-headed monster of evil was to come to earth in the form of a man to shut down this deluge at the source: human sinfulness. This is why the message of this great work is called the gospel (good news).

Jesus announced it when he began His earthly ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

The claim that the gospel is the cure for injustice is certainly a bold one but, in reality, is the essence of Christianity. My hope is to challenge people who claim to be followers of Christ to grasp the far-reaching claims of the gospel message. When this happens, we can never again be ambivalent about its power or priority in our lives. What anchors this truth—that knowing the gospel is the most fundamental human right—is that without God, there is no ultimate source or foundation for any human rights. In defending the thesis of this book, we must begin with answering the important question, where do human rights come from?

The Rise of Human Rights

The idea of human rights is the most important, controversial, and compelling issue of our generation. There is no greater label you can attach to a cause or concern than this.
A landmark in the modern-day rise of human rights can be traced to 1948, when the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the wake of World War II and the loss of millions of people who were murdered simply because they were Jewish, Polish, or of any ethnicity deemed “undesirable” by the Nazis. In total an estimated 50 million worldwide died because of the conflict. The declaration included thirty basic human rights that more than 190 nations eventually would affirm. The UN hoped to use its authority to ground the rights of all people in this document. (By right, I’m referring to a moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in a certain way.) The basic rights listed in the UN declaration include the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech. You could conjoin these two rights with this definition: the right to believe and the right to voice those beliefs.

In recent decades the subject of human rights has taken center stage in the public consciousness in the West, as discussed in the UK’s Guardian: “The use of ‘human rights’ in English-language books has increased 200-fold since 1940, and is used today 100 times more often than terms such as ‘constitutional rights’ and ‘natural rights.’” While the increased awareness and focus have been enormously needed and important, most have sought to establish these rights without a solid foundation. As we will discuss shortly, if human authority is the source of these rights, then they can be taken away as well as granted. Many human rights advocates seek to establish fundamental rights apart from any recognition of God and His moral standards. This is an attempt to establish a secular, religion-free basis for how humans deserve to be treated. This seems to be the mind-set of philosophers such as Richard Rorty, who dismiss any notion of duty or allegiance to God as the grounding of morals or right human behavior:
I think the answer to the question “Where does our duty lie today?” is “Our only duty is to our fellow citizens.” You may conceive your fellow citizens as the other Italians, your fellow Europeans, or your fellow humans. But, whatever the boundaries of one’s sense of responsibility, this sense of civic responsibility is possible even if you have never heard either of reason or of religious faith.7

Rorty is correct in saying that you know that there are moral duties without hearing about reason or religious faith. But that simply implies that you are ignorant of where they come from, not that they have no ultimate source. Severing morals and human rights from the ground in which they have grown and flourished is like doing the same to a beautiful flower. It’s only a matter of time until its beauty fades. So it is with the culture and society that bloomed into the most influential and prosperous in world history because of its roots of faith in God.

The framers of the United States Declaration of Independence understood this principle and clearly stated, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” This ideal was the result of the influence of John Locke (1632–1704), considered a philosophical father of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Historical revisionists seeking to erase the influence of Scripture and theism on the founding of America want to obscure Locke’s faith and its influence on his thinking. This is historical revisionism on full display. Locke’s belief in the Christian faith clearly motivated his view of human rights. His theory of unalienable rights invokes God, posing a problem for those who seek a moral basis for human rights that does not rest on religious assumptions.8
If there is any doubt about his faith in God, his book *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Revealed in the Scriptures* (1695) confirmed his belief in the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

And that he was the Messiah, was the great truth he took pains to convince his disciples and apostles of; appearing to them after his resurrection: as may be seen, Luke xxiv. which we shall more particularly consider in another place. There we read what gospel our Savior preached to his disciples and apostles; and that as soon as he was risen from the dead, twice, the very day of his resurrection.

The point is, we are products of divine creation; therefore, our rights as humans are grounded in a transcendent moral authority. This connection of God to human rights is foundational in the same way that many philosophers have recognized that without God there are no moral absolutes. If these rights came from humans, then they wouldn’t be inalienable; that is, they could be taken away. Vishal Mangalwadi, one of India’s leading intellectuals, made the connection between God, the inalienable rights mentioned in the US Declaration, and Locke, adding the word sacred: “In his original draft, Thomas Jefferson penned, ‘We hold these truths to be *sacred* and *unalienable*.’ That was the truth. That’s why the Declaration grounded the ‘unalienable’ rights in the Creator rather than in the state.”

As for the assertion of truth being self-evident, it was due to the culture of faith in God that existed at that time. What was self-evident then appears not to be so self-evident today. To take God out of the equation when anchoring human rights is to remove from them the foundation necessary to survive the shifting tides
of human opinion. As pastor Tim Keller explained, human rights simply don’t make sense in a materialistic, survival-of-the-fittest worldview:

Historians tell us that the idea of rights grew out of societies that believed in the God of the Bible. That is not a proof of the existence of God. Nevertheless, human rights make more sense in a universe created by God. Without God, it is difficult to explain why or how they exist.11

Keller states the obvious: belief in existence of the God of the Bible is the source of our belief in human rights.

The Origin of Human Rights

Can you imagine the Supreme Court of the United States of America declaring a man “not guilty” and then awarding him capital punishment? Two thousand years ago a Roman governor did exactly that: Pilate pronounced the verdict that Jesus’ accuser had failed to provide any basis for a charge against Him. This disrespect of human rights on behalf of the powerful typifies the reality of injustice in the ancient world. How could the Chief Justice of Israel kill an innocent Messiah? Didn’t he know that he was violating an innocent person’s fundamental right to life, as well as undermining the people’s trust in the judicial system?12

For most of history, governments terrorized people into submission. Ancient Rome recognized no authority greater than Caesar’s. Therefore, pre-Christian Europe had no transcendent source of law that could limit the state’s power over an individual. As in every pagan or atheistic civilization, the state’s power was ultimate and totalitarian. Because of this, no individual can
possibly have a secure, inalienable, or fundamental right to life unless there is a God who has declared this. It is vital to understand that the concept of human rights in the way we recognize them today would have made no sense in the classical world of the Greeks or Romans.¹³

This is why the Bible should be viewed as a great gift by God to humankind. It is truly the fountainhead of freedom and human rights. For example, the Ten Commandments given to Moses more than three thousand years ago were actually statements of individual human rights. For instance, the command to not murder delineated the right to life; the command to not steal spoke of the right to personal property. The teachings of Scripture are clear about just and unjust behavior. (We will look at this in greater detail in chapter 3.)

It was the belief in God, who had created mankind for a purpose, that proved human beings had a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The existence of God was as self-evident as the rights that emanated from Him. The point is that the backdrop of Christianity and its principles have shaped Western culture and have provided the moral framework from which human rights could emerge.

This was the significance of the period in history known as the Reformation. More than five hundred years ago (1517), a German monk named Martin Luther changed history by publicly proclaiming that all human authority, particularly ecclesiastical rulers, were subject to the law of God and not above it. To say this was revolutionary is an understatement. Not since the establishment of ancient Israel had there been a recognition of truth and the rule of law taking precedence over human authority. For approximately the next three hundred years, there would be a flowering of Western civilization due to this worldview. During this period,
great strides would be made toward peacefully reforming nations and kingdoms in light of the truth that God had created the world and made us as humans in His image. Furthermore, He had communicated to us in the Bible and given us the moral code that led to life, freedom, and happiness.

The Age of Skepticism

Eventually there would be a concerted attack to disprove the existence of God and discredit the Bible as a reliable source of truth. As King David warned more than three thousand years ago, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3 ESV). Radical skepticism came of age in the nineteenth century. It was Friedrich Nietzsche who is credited with the statement “God is dead.” This phrase appeared in his writings and was placed on the lips of a madman who goes into the center of a village and begins to cry aloud to the people passing by, “Where is God? I am looking for God.”

The bystanders begin to mock him and say, “Has he gone on vacation?” and “Is he lost?” Then the madman turns to them and delivers his message: “God is dead.”

He goes on to chide the onlookers with this haunting rant:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?14
His deluded message was not that God had never existed but that the idea or concept of God had died. Nietzsche understood the implications of what the “death of God” meant. It meant that the rules of morality that civilization assumed were true were dead as well. Without God, the foundation of the morality that had emanated from this belief was dead. Nietzsche also wrote about a “super-man” in the belief that humanity needed to be unshackled from these restrictive beliefs. In the end, life was meaningless. The super-man would, therefore, look into the meaninglessness and assert his or her own meaning.

This is why it has been so important to articulate the evidence for God’s existence. Most people who claim to believe in God (or gods)—worldwide, at least eight out of ten people—would simply cite an intuitive belief or a testimony of some type of subjective experience. These reasons are certainly legitimate. But it is vital that we be able to defend the existence of God to those who do not share or understand our personal experiences. This again was my primary motivation in writing the book God’s Not Dead. In that book I detailed nine key areas of evidence for the existence of God, including the beginning of the universe, the origin of life, the reality of good and evil, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we learn later in this book, it is important to help unbelievers realize the faith commitments and presuppositions that their worldview assumes. For instance, Penn Jillette, an entertainer as well as an atheist, concedes that certain beliefs he accepts—such as the existence of the external world—cannot be 100 percent proven in a mathematical sense, but he feels rational in accepting this as true. He then proceeds to accuse believers in God of not being able to prove God’s existence. Yet just as he accepts the existence of certain things that can’t be proven (the existence of minds other than his own and the
laws of logic, mathematical truths, and so on), he says believers are rational for assuming a creator and designer of the universe.

Most of the time we are battling insults rather than arguments. Perhaps the world’s most famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, wrote in his book *The God Delusion*:

I am inclined to follow Robert M. Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*: “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion.”

Atheists such as Dawkins endlessly repeat slogans like “There is no evidence for God.” Yet when you ask them, “What would you accept as evidence?” they pause and either propose some outlandish request for God to write His name (or theirs) in the sky or honestly admit they haven’t really considered the question. In the end they are guilty of circular reasoning by concluding there is no evidence for God because God doesn’t exist. Should you meet someone who seems merely to echo the standard skeptical slogans, you can respectfully offer them one of your own:

*Belief in God is a conclusion, not a delusion.*

### Why Secularism Can’t Establish Human Rights

The alternative to the theistic foundation of human rights is the philosophy of *secularism*. Secularism defines all of life in physical terms, driven by the natural law of cause and effect. Consequently,
the authority of Scripture is rejected, and the very possibility that God would reveal Himself or His will to humanity is denied. Man would henceforth look only to himself to reshape society. Secular values attempt to replace moral values rooted in a theistic worldview. The problems with secularism as a foundation for human rights could be summarized as follows:

1. There is no source grounding them objectively. If God does not exist and man is a product of a purely materialistic evolutionary process, then any concept of human rights could only be a product of the same process. Certainly these rights can be asserted, but that doesn’t make them really true and morally binding.

Writing from a Christian perspective, Keller agrees with this: “I’m not saying that you can’t assert rights from a secular foundation, I’m saying they don’t really follow from an evolutionary world view.”

Friedrich Nietzsche concurs: “Once sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and with him these sinners. To sin against the earth is now the most terrible sin, and to revere the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth!”

It must be pointed out that in some countries, a secular government means that there will be a measure of religious liberty (e.g., Turkey). While this is certainly a good thing, I am talking about the very foundation of these secular values. These so-called secular values of liberty and freedom came from the Judeo-Christian worldview. This doesn’t mean that secular values aren’t true or that secular people cannot be moral. It means that secularism can’t offer a real foundation for the values they espouse.

2. There is no standard of ultimate justice. With secularism, the only basis for societal rules are people’s choices to embrace
some social contract, so moral standards change according to people’s whims. Any desire can be elevated to the status of a right, and any existing right can eventually be denied. Even more problematic, in times of stress people could surrender their fundamental rights to dictators in exchange for the promises of security or prosperity, as was done in Nazi Germany and fascist Italy—to the citizens’ dire regret.

Like a restaurant that offers its menu on a chalkboard so the items can be replaced when they are no longer popular, a society can change its values to match the mood and beliefs of the people of that generation. Going even further down the rabbit hole, the secularism that was spawned from the Age of Enlightenment (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) dismissed the idea of any overarching purpose in the universe. All that exist are matter and physical energy, governed by the laws of cause and effect guided by the “blind watchmaker” of natural selection. If there is no purpose, then there is no way of knowing what is good or bad in terms of human behavior.

3. There is no solution for the problem of evil. In the end, secularism has no real solution for the problem of evil. If man is an animal or a molecular machine that acts according to genetic programming, then there is little hope for real reform. How do you address a problem you don’t really understand? Evil is obvious. As we will look at in detail in the next chapter, it is indisputable that evil is the scourge of the human race. To ignore it or deny its existence is to simply empower it.

Going a step further, the idea of a secular society is itself a myth. A secular society is not a valueless culture but one where traditional beliefs are exchanged for new gods (idols). Theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin wrote:
We have learned, I think, that what has come into being is not a secular society but a pagan society, not a society devoid of public images but a society which worships gods which are not God. But the myth of the secular society remains powerful.

We can also dismiss the notion that secular values offer some kind of neutral ground where cultures can find values apart from any reference to God.

Does this mean that secular people can’t be concerned with human rights? Of course not. Keller, however, makes the point that secular people fail to acknowledge the religious foundations of their actions: “This in no way means that nonreligious people cannot believe in human dignity and human rights. Millions of them can and do. But any such belief is, in itself, essentially religious in nature.”

Even though I will make the case that the gospel is the solution for the problem of evil, people first must hear the message so they can access this incredible promise. You could discover a cure for cancer, but without knowledge about it, people would continue to die. As the prophet Hosea warned, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

This fact was dramatically seen in the American civil rights movement in the 1960s. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an ordained minister, stated in his “I Have a Dream” speech that the masses had come to Washington, DC, to cash a check that had been written nearly two hundred years before, stating that all men are created equal and have inalienable rights. King said he had come to claim those rights. Reminding the African American community that their rights were being trampled on was a critical step in
the process for deliverance and justice. In the same way, when we come to God and hear about His promises for forgiveness of sins, we can claim the right to become a citizen of heaven, no longer hiding in the spiritual shadows, shrinking from divine justice. We can be truly free.

Why Would God Allow Evil?

For many people, the greatest stumbling block to their embracing the Christian faith remains the problem of evil. In spite of the evidence for God’s existence and the truth that human rights are dependent on that reality, many default to the age-old question, why would a loving God allow evil? The emotional nature of the argument makes it difficult to respond. I’m constantly aware that personal pain can be overwhelming. When people present this objection, I am very slow to react with a philosophical answer. Many times I just listen and try to serve as a comforter as much as possible.

If, however, this is presented as nothing more than an argument against God, I feel compelled to answer head-on that God has given us the tremendous privilege and right to choose. Our moral choices are real and have consequences in this life and the one to come.

Ample facts demonstrate that humans have the power to rid the world of moral evil (the evil due to man’s inhumanity to man). Yet time and again we have used our resources and technology to perpetrate the problem of evil. Last year, while addressing a small gathering of students in a classroom at Georgetown University, I was asked the question, how could a loving God allow evil?
Turning to the whiteboard, I wrote out the number one trillion. That is the dollar amount nations spend collectively on their national defenses. This number does not include the amounts spent on police, security, and all the related costs from the legal fallout of crime and social evil. It also doesn’t factor in the cost of war in terms of the impact on the people and the environment.

I asked the follow-up question: *What could we buy with a trillion dollars?* In other words, if humans were basically good, then we wouldn’t need to waste all this money protecting ourselves from one another. The first thing we should do is end world hunger. According to the World Health Organization, we could feed every person on the planet for thirty billion dollars a year—for just a mere 3 percent of the total defense budget.\(^\text{22}\) Think about how revolutionary that would be. The headline could finally read, “The End of Hunger.” Then what about clean water and sanitation? The lack of these necessities is the cause of so much disease and misery. British comedian Stephen Fry was asked what he would say to God if he met Him face-to-face. He responded with an angry rant about cancer in children and the terrible hardships humanity suffers, and then he mentioned an insect that bores into the eyes of little children.\(^\text{23}\) The disease he highlighted would be eliminated if those areas that are afflicted had clean water and adequate sanitation.

The price tag for the monumental task of giving every person on the planet clean water and sanitary living conditions? One hundred billion dollars a year.\(^\text{24}\) That’s 10 percent of the total yearly defense budget. So let’s add this up. For less than 15 percent of the money the world spends on defending themselves from one another, we could give every person in the world clean water and food.
As they say on TV, “But wait! There’s more!”

The World Health Organization says that for every one dollar spent on clean water and sanitation, we receive seven dollars back in terms of savings from all the costs surrounding health care and mitigation of this massive evil. So that means if we spent one hundred billion dollars on clean water and sanitation, we would save seven hundred billion dollars. We actually would profit by performing these life-saving services for our fellow man. We could then devote this money to moving people away from disaster zones or rebuilding cities and villages to withstand earthquakes and other natural disasters. Though we couldn’t eliminate all human suffering completely, we could go a long way toward making such tragedies as scarce as polio. These facts demand a response to the question, why don’t we perform these services?

The reason is, something is broken in the human condition.

Transformation: Inside Out

“Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” (John 3:3, author’s paraphrase)

God wants evil to stop happening not just to you, but through you. This transformation from the inside out has been how God has lifted people and nations for the past two thousand years. As Vishal Mangalwadi observed:

When the light comes in and begins to dwell in us, our inner darkness will be driven out. In other words, Jesus does what no dictator can do. A dictator could punish me
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for taking a bribe, but Jesus deals with the greed in my heart that prompts me to covet other people’s money. A dictator could punish me for abusing my wife. Jesus, if he dwells in my heart, convicts and asks me to repent. He also gives me his power to love. When I invite Jesus to come into my heart by his Spirit, then I am born again into a new spiritual life.27

Like the law of entropy, which states that things will go from order to disorder unless acted on by an outside source, God is the One who raises us up and saves us from the inexorable slide into evil and despair. As the book of Romans states, “The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (8:2 ESV). This language of lifting us up or raising us up with Christ is a major theme in the New Testament. Christianity started in the most unlikely place, against all odds. The Roman Empire exerted absolute power over a majority of the world and cared little about human rights. Though Roman citizens had certain civic rights, the idea that slaves could be freed or children had any special protection was, to say the least, not their concern. Jesus entered this hostile milieu with a message of transformation of the heart. He didn’t focus on the outward oppression that afflicted the masses; He came to deal with injustice at its source.

After His death and resurrection, He sent His disciples into the world to preach the gospel. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19 ESV). They were to announce that a new kingdom was present. To believe meant to enter this kingdom and follow the orders of the King: Jesus Christ. The confession that was made was “Jesus Christ is Lord.” This didn’t mean rebellion and overthrow of the secular
powers, but a recognition that members of this new kingdom had a higher set of laws to obey. The supreme command was to love God and love your neighbor as Christ had done for you.

Jesus called people to love everyone—regardless of ethnicity, class, or religion. He dealt with racism head-on. When asked, “Who is my neighbor?” He answered with a story we have come to call the parable of the good Samaritan. The story centered on a man who was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves and was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. I have been on that road many times. Though it is obviously paved today, you can imagine the danger of someone traveling through the hills and winding little roads two millennia ago. Jesus described how two different people passed by who could have helped the man, and both were apparently religiously observant. But they diverted their attention elsewhere and stepped around the dying man.

Then a Samaritan came along and stopped to help. This man of another ethnicity was the hero of the story. Jesus calls us to do the same. Throughout history, this kind of obedience to Christ has raised up people and the societies they live in. Christianity would dramatically affect the Roman Empire and the barbarians who came to invade it. As the gospel spread, it revolutionized nations and grew to more than two billion adherents. The good that came to the world has been too overwhelming to ignore.

To live in opposition to God’s Word is to unleash the chaos and turmoil of hell through our very hearts and lives. Christ alone has the power to stop this at its source. This is no time to be uncertain about the truth of the message, unclear about the need to share it, or to lack confidence in its power to transform anything and everything it touches.
Summary

God is the source of human rights. The existence of God points to a solid foundation for these rights that secularism and materialism can’t provide. Realizing this gives us confidence to present the gospel as a viable solution for the evil that plagues the human race. We can engage the world around us with compassion and give those who disagree with the message the dignity and respect they deserve because they are created in God’s image. Everyone has the right to make real choices about their morals and destiny.

The existence of evil continues to be a stumbling block to many in spite of any of the sound philosophical arguments that might be presented. Nothing is more painful and vexing to overcome. The gospel provides the only real hope for what is called the problem of evil. Not only does it deal with injustice at its source; it also provides comfort that justice will ultimately be served to everyone. I have had more conversations than I could count in which this question of evil eventually becomes the focus of the conversation. Many have admitted their attitude of rejecting God because of evil may not be really justified, but it’s all they can do to push back against the torment they feel. It is at this point I am so grateful that I can present the fact that God entered history as Jesus Christ. He was called by the prophet Isaiah “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” (Isaiah 53:3).

The message God brought to humanity was that He cared for us enough to do something about injustice. This isn’t what some would call “fake news” or “alternative facts”; it is public truth that can withstand investigation and scrutiny. The billions of people on this planet have the right to know the message and how it impacts their lives.
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