

# Does the world need a secular crusade?



**CHRIS HIGHLAND**  
HIGHLAND VIEWS

I was once “there.” Now I’m “here.” I’m speaking of the small bubble called fundamentalism, where the world — “the world” — is a very scary, dangerous, threatening thing. I was a fundamental believer, then an evangelical, then pentecostal, then conservative, then liberal Christian. Then ... well ... here I am.

Once upon a time I was “saved” by Billy Graham. He would be quick to correct me — God saved me when I “asked Jesus into my heart.” OK. But it was through a “crusade” that I heard the preaching and “accepted Jesus” into my life.

I was only 13, but apparently already such a desperately sinful human being, so lost that the Lord of the Universe had to kill his only Son for ME. I felt terrible and terribly afraid. God was angry at my sin but loved me so much he had His only child — once a teen like me — executed so He could forgive me.

For the next 40 years or so I was a believer, following Jesus through high school, college, seminary and years of ministry.

That’s enough about my history.

In a recent opinion piece, Rev. Graham was asked about the rise of secularism — why, according to some polls, more people are drifting from religious faith. His response was not surprising, and I would normally skim his “biblically based” answer, but this seemed to invite (or at least elicit) a clear response, since I’m one of those dreaded seculars.

Now and then I think it wise, perhaps necessary, to respond to the fears and fantasies that drive some to hate nonbelievers so much.



COURTESY OF CHRIS HIGHLAND

Chris Highland's caption for this photo is: "Flowers (Turk's Cap) in a 'fallen' world?"

Rev. Graham's first comment to the questioner was, “The poll you mention may well be correct; similar surveys seem to point in the same direction. We are living in an increasingly secular and non-religious society, and many people today never think about God or make Him a part of their lives.”

He’s right, of course. Increasing numbers of people are leaving churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and sometimes even faith itself.

Yet a lot of people still believe something; maybe they consider themselves “spiritual” or have a vague idea of a “creative force” in the universe. There is a wide spectrum of belief. And yes, a lot of others choose to not believe in the supernatural any longer. As Billy says, they may never think about God — at least the Christian God.

Why are people choosing not to be-

lieve? Billy says, “One reason is because we have failed to pass on our faith in Christ to the next generation ... we have failed to explain the Gospel to them and urge them to commit their lives to Christ.”

People aren’t becoming believers because believers aren’t doing their job. This is the old missionary zeal that causes believers to feel guilt for not converting more of the world to keep people from divine punishment. That’s a huge burden to bear.

He says Christians need to show more love, however, “There are ... other reasons why our world seems to be less and less religious. Growing materialism, a preoccupation with pleasure, pressures from a secular media, the lessening of family ties, growing immorality — the list is almost endless.”

Rev. Graham has been saying this

for many years. He warns that secular people only want more and more pleasure, seeking to destroy families and offering nothing but ungodly materialism and immorality. Pretty bad. “The list is almost endless.” Very black and white. Note the danger of the “secular media” — the whispers of Satan?

He ends his warnings, as he did when I heard him all those years ago: “Only Christ can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart, and only He can change our lives and give us hope for the future.”

A simple message. Almost irresistible. But millions are now resisting, because millions have seen that believing in one God or another is no guarantee someone will be good, honest, moral, loving or happy. As the world has gotten smaller and people are interconnecting we find there’s more than just one faith to choose from, and being humanist, agnostic, atheist or a free-thinker can be a reasonable alternative.

Maybe you saw the story about people setting up tables along some of our hiking trails to proselytize. I’m not surprised. Back in my evangelistic days I would hand Bibles and booklets to anyone anywhere anytime.

There was no time to listen — it was my job to save them! Now I find it very sad. Preaching about other worlds when this one — with all of its problems — is so wonderful and beautiful and there’s so much to learn from so many interesting people.

Believe it or not there is no “Secular crusade.” But sometimes I think: Maybe there should be.

*Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer, free-thinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Learn more at [chighland.com](http://chighland.com).*