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## How Not to Fight Atheism

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There is nothing so short-sighted and unhelpful as Christian insecurity — and this kind of insecurity recently led to predictable results in Fort Worth, Texas. In early December, the Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason — a group dedicated to raising the profile of secularists, atheists, and agnostics — began running advertisements on Fort Worth public buses that read, “Millions of Americans are Good Without God.”

Some Christians responded with outrage. “The ads are hurtful to the people who do believe in God, and I proudly believe in Jesus Christ,” said one woman. A coalition of Fort Worth pastors called for a boycott of public transportation. According to The Associated Press:

*The Rev. Kyev Tatum, pastor of Friendship Rock Baptist Church, said not only the community but also some bus drivers have been offended by the ads, set to run this week until a printing problem caused a delay. Tatum called for a boycott, saying about a dozen churches would try to provide rides for anyone who refused to ride a city bus over the atheist ads.*



These offended Christians called for action by transportation officials, and they did not have to wait long for a response. The Fort Worth Transportation Authority voted December 15 to ban *all* religious ads on buses. The policy took effect January 1, 2011. According to press reports, “both sides cheered the decision.”

Christians are sometimes our own worst enemy, especially when we claim to be offended. Those pastors and concerned Christians who demanded that the transportation authority ban the atheist ads actually gave the secularists the Grand Prize. By precipitating (and, of all things, celebrating) a ban on all religious messages from this public space, these Christians surrendered Gospel opportunities simply because they were offended by an atheist advertisement. No wonder the atheists clapped.

This is a disastrous strategy. Are Christians so insecure that we fear a weakly-worded advertisement on a public bus? These bus ads represent just how weak the atheists’ arguments really are, but the response from agitated Christians represents a far more dangerous weakness. Instead of responding to the ads with a firm and gracious defense of the Gospel, these activists just surrendered the space altogether, rather than to bear the offense of the cross.

Christianity has enemies, and the greatest victory of these enemies is to prevent the proclamation of the Gospel. The strategy so celebrated in Fort Worth is a route to evangelistic disaster. Religious liberty is a friend of the Gospel, and constraints on religious speech serve the cause of the secularists.

Being a Christian does not mean never having to be offended. Like the Apostle Paul, we are called to bear the offense of the cross gladly. If Paul had followed the Fort Worth strategy, Acts 17 would never have happened.

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“[Fort Worth Bans Religious, Atheist Bus Ads](#),” United Press International [UPI], Thursday, December 16, 2010.

“[Atheist Ads on Ft. Worth Buses Causing Uproar](#),” The Associated Press [AP], Saturday, December 4, 2010.

Tim Madigan and Gordon Dickson, "[Atheist-themed Ads Appear on Fort Worth Buses.](#)" *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Tuesday, November 30, 2010.

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