

Confronting Christianity – Part 4

Doesn't religion hinder morality?

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Sept 18th, 2022

Intro:

- Doesn't religion hinder morality? It may seem like an absurd question to you, but some of those who are looking into the windows of religion are asking this question based on what they see. The claim is that religion makes people less moral, not more, and that religion just gives people a "divine justification" for their evil and immoral behavior. In some cases, this is certainly true.
- I could easily point my finger at and draw your attention to religions other than Christianity to highlight some of their practices and official doctrines that justify evil in the name of their god.
- But those of us who claim Christianity have plenty of examples to examine ourselves. From brutalizing countries in the name of Christ during the Crusades, to burning people at the stake for all types of offenses, to grievous clergy abuse and coverups in various forms, to those who faithfully attend church hypocritically falling short of Christian ethics, teaching, and values, Christians have definitely done some immoral things.
- These things should greatly grieve you, cause a pit in your stomach, and make you justifiably angry. Not only do these abuses do serious damage and harm to people, but they discredit and desecrate the name of Jesus and keep people from Christ and His church. These abuses grieve the heart of Christ and anger Him.
- Jesus' harshest words and strongest rebukes are to religious leaders, those who cause harm and abuse others in the name of God. He called them hypocrites, children of hell, blind guides, blind fools, whitewashed tombs full of dead man's bones, lawless, serpents, brood of vipers, and murderers (see Matt. 23 and Luke 11). He accused them of shutting "the kingdom of heaven in people's faces" and they "neither enter [them]selves nor allow those who would enter go in" (Matt. 23:13). He said "woe to" them and that on them "may come all the righteous blood shed on earth" (Matt. 23:35). No wonder they wanted to kill Him.
- Abuses do happen in the name of God and in the name of Christianity. These things were a primary reason why Christopher Hitchens wrote his book *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* in 2009. I would say that religion does not poison everything, but sin does, and religious sin, is the most poisonous of them all.
- Dr. McLaughlin points out several problems with the claim that "religion hurts morality," and she states:

There is also substantial evidence that religious practice correlates with a range of moral goods. In his 2018 book *The Character Gap: How Good Are We?* philosopher Christian Miller observes that "literally hundreds of studies" link religious participation with better moral outcomes. For example, sociologists Christopher Ellison and Kristen Anderson discovered that levels of domestic violence in a US sample were almost twice as high for men who did not attend church versus those who attended once a week or more. Religious participation has also been linked to lower rates for forty-three other crimes. In North America, regular service attenders donate 3.5 times the money given by their nonreligious counterparts per year and volunteer more than twice as much (McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity* p. 61).

- I can personally give testimony of how Christ has changed my life, and in this room, there are hundreds of testimonies of the power of Christ to change lives. Throughout history and the world, millions of people have stories of changed lives, transformed hearts and minds, and of great good done because of Christ.
- As Christians, or those considering Christ, it is important for you to understand the biblical perspective on morality, reality, and finality as it is connected to God and humankind. Understanding these things will give you a biblical view of the world, yourself, and God so that your faith can be deepened, your hope can be assured, and your love will grow larger.

Our shared morality

- One of the first questions we need to ask is, where do humanity's ethics and morality come from? Studies have shown that people around the world and of all ages share a strikingly similar set of morals and values of right and wrong regardless of religion. Those who are against religion point to the fact that you do not need religion to be a moral person. But again, we need to ask the question, where did this universal morality come from?
- The answer the Bible provides is that ethics and morality come from the creator of heaven and earth. That God Himself has written His law on all of our hearts, and our consciences also bear witness to this.

Rom 2:14-16 ESV

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.

- Why do people have a sense of what is right and wrong, what is good and evil? Because God made us all this way. This is His common grace, seen in His crowning creation—humans—who He made in "His image" (Gen. 1:26-27).
- Also, God, in His general revelation, has made Himself known to all of humanity.

Rom 1:20-21 ESV

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

- Humanity's common morality and a general understanding of God come from God Himself. Morality was given to all His creation, everywhere. Not only does humanity have a shared morality, but we also have a shared reality.

Our shared reality

- Our shared reality is that we are all sinners.

Rom 3:23 ESV

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

- All of us have not lived to honor and glorify God for who He is, and all of us have rebelled against Him by not living according to His nature. We have all sinned in Adam, and we are all born with a sin nature as his descendants.
- Many people believe that people are good. But Jesus says that only God is good.

Luke 18:24 ESV

"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

- Paul echoes this statement in the book of Romans by quoting Psalm 14 and Psalm 53:

Rom 3:9-18 ESV

Both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." 13 "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." 14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

- From the biblical perspective, God is the only one who is good, all of us together fall short of the glory of God, and even our "good works" without Him are as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).
- This is where Jesus comes in. He is the star of the Old Testament and the glory of the New. Because of humanity's fallen condition, our sin, rebellion, self-justified abuses, and the like, Jesus came "to save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21), to give right standing before God and a new life.

2 Cor 5:21 ESV

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- In Jesus, we have become the righteousness of God. We have right standing with God, because Jesus is our "stand-in" before God. Then God credits to us what Jesus has done and gives us His Spirit to enable and empower us to live in Him, through Him, and for Him.
- Even with this, Christians can and do sin. Even though we have a new nature, we still have to choose to walk accordingly. When we do, good things come of it, and when we choose not to, evil and sin are the result.

Gal 5:16-18 ESV

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Eph 4:21-24 ESV

Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the Spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

- Those who have the Spirit of Christ living in them have a choice to follow that Spirit, which leads to living out the fruit of the Spirit. Or people may choose to live in accordance with their old nature, which is immorality—contrary to the Spirit and teachings of scripture.
- Christian doctrine also teaches a commonality to all humanity, our shared finality.

Our shared finality

- This is how the Bible puts it plainly and bluntly.

Heb 9:27 NIV

Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

Rom 14:10-12 ESV

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." 12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Cor 5:10 ESV

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

- This is the finality of all humanity according to the Bible. We will die once (and all will die unless they are still alive in this present body when Christ returns). We are not reincarnated, and we are held accountable by God. What we believe matters, and what we do matters.

Rom 2:6-11 ESV

He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

- This teaching is repeated all over the Bible. And according to it, this is how it will flow. This is not works salvation, for our salvation is based upon what Christ has done. He is our righteousness, and we are justified through Him. Our righteousness is based on what He has done, and our reward is based upon what we do. If you are in Him, how you live and what you do matters. God is concerned about our actions and activity.

Eph 2:8-10 ESV

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- It is by grace we have been saved; it is a gift of God. And we are created by Him and recreated in Him to do good works that He has prepared, and we should walk in them.

Conclusion

- These are the realities that are laid out by the Bible and are seen in Christianity. If we are in Christ, then we are to walk as Jesus did. We have a choice to believe in Him and to follow Him. He will hold us accountable for what He has given us and we will be rewarded accordingly.
- Jesus is our only hope for righteousness, and He invites all to place their faith and trust in Him. Then, with this reality and finality laid out in the Bible, those who claim Christ must take this seriously and live accordingly. He has laid a path for you to follow; follow it with all your might.
- Does religion crush morality? The abuse of it does. However, in following the principles, heart, and empowerment of the Spirit, those who are in Christ should live lives that are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, which are good, right, and moral.
- Transition to communion.