

Smokin Roastin Toastin'

Series Slide

From the turn of 21st century until about 2012- a movement grew that was eventually labeled "The New Atheism".

The New Atheism was different than the old atheism in that its leaders didn't just NOT believe in God- but actively preached that religion- and particularly Christianity- was evil and Immoral. Christopher Hitchens- one of the "Four Horsemen of the New Atheism" wrote a book entitled "God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.")

So- yeah- it was pretty direct.

This was all in the wake of 9/11 which on one hand, for a short time- sent Americans flocking back to churches- on the other hand- had people wondering- Would all those people have lived if there was no religion inspiring that act of terrorism?

Jon Lennon sang about in one of his most well known songs- "Imagine"

**Imagine there's no countries
it isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too.**

IOW, Religions are just like countries- they define a group of people as insiders and say outsiders are bad and make war against them.

The growing sentiment throughout this movement was that religion didn't offer the world anything good- only violence, war, and injustice.

Steven Weinberg famously said,

"With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil- that takes religion."- Steven Weinberg

Christopher Hitchens- from his book "God is not Great" wrote this

"We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true—that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic-cleanser raise an eyebrow...As I write these words, and as

you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction,...Religion poisons everything.”- Christopher Hitchens

Title Slide- “Crusades, Slavery, & #churchtoo: Why Christianity is Believable Even When Christians Aren’t” Genesis 1:26-28, Matthew 7:1-12

History is littered with religious atrocities committed against humanity. That is very true.

Even if you only consider the evils that the CHRISTIAN church has been a part of- its overwhelming.

In the Crusades- from 1095-1291 AD-anywhere from hundreds of thousands to millions of people were killed in the name of the Christian church- converting people at threat of death.

Many Xians and churches used the Bible to condone 18th century race-based chattel slavery.

What about the Christians and churches in Germany during WWII that turned a blind eye or even actively condoned the actions of Hitler and the 3rd Reich?

Most of us here- lived through the abuse scandal of the Catholic church. Which didn't stop there. That only further shined a light on the Protestant churches where rampant physical and sexual abuse was happening AND often being minimized or covered up by Xians.

The #metoo movement of 2017 that began exposing the abuse done by Hollywood actors and directors- eventually spawned #churchtoo- which exposed pastors and church staff involved in the sexual abuse of women and minors.

That doesn't even address the Salem Witch trials and the Spanish Inquisition, and the things Xians did to one another through the Reformation- including murdering people over the way they chose to baptize converts- or the lives lost in terrorism or wars between Protestant and Catholics.

Of course- none of that includes what you may have endured personally- in whatever your story is.

I want to tell you today- in whatever way you've experienced the injustice of the church- I'm sorry.

Sometimes- when we think about historical injustices- we are far enough removed from them that we talk about them sort of academically or trivially- but the truth is- from the Crusades to Churches that condoned and perpetuated slavery and racism- all of the people affected were Mothers, Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, Uncles, Aunts, Cousins, Friends, Sons and Daughters. All of them had families and lives. As real as our hurts our today- theirs were just as real.

So what should we make of this?
Does this prove something?
Does it undermine the truthfulness of Xianity?

Maybe you're wondering how I can stand up here and preach about Jesus- and be committed to his Church- when I know how ugly the church's history is. Maybe you're wondering if- like so many of the churches injustices- I'm just here because it profits me financially or gives me a position of power.

I understand that. And me just telling you that "I'm different." or "this church is different" probably won't really make a hill of beans difference to you.

So- that's not what I'm going to do today.

Instead I want to show you today that if you are truly bothered by the injustices of the church over the centuries- then you are already well on your way to following Jesus.

In fact- you're already embracing Xian doctrine that you probably are completely unaware is uniquely Christian.

...and you might just be completely overlooking the one thing that sets Xianity apart from every other religion.

So lets start by reading some Scripture....then I'll show you that you actually need Xianity...to be angry at the church.

Genesis 1:26-28

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image;

he created him in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”

Matthew 7:1-5; 12

“Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged.

2 For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. 3 Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye.

12 Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient. 3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift — 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

- 1) Jesus was critical of the church’s injustice...and Christians that actually listened to him changed things.

If you’ve ever been to a karaoke bar or a child’s first piano or violin recital- you know what it means for somebody to absolutely butcher a song.

The question is how do you know they played it poorly? The answer is you know what the piece is supposed to sound like. And it aint that.

Now- imagine if all a person ever heard of Bach or Beethoven or the Beatles or Bob Marley was a 5 year old banging out a Concerto or a tone-deaf friend belting out “HEY JUDE!” off key.

They would not only think those songs and composers weren’t good- but that no one should ever have to endure them.

But- if you know what the composer or artist has actually wrtitten- and heard it performed- well- you can acurately judge the piece by the original. While still holding the original with high regard.

In the myriad of ways that people have claimed to be acting in the name of Christ- while they perform injustices- they have said to a watching world- “This is the kind of music Jesus composed.”

And that is simply not true.

And if anybody should know about that- ITs Jesus.

First, Jesus was highly critical of the religious leaders of his time. So- it wasn’t Xianity- because Christianity didn’t exist yet- but its precursor- the Jewish reliigon- certainly did.

And the religious leaders of the Jews were the scribes and Pharisees.

Everyone looked to the Scribes and the Pharisees to understand what the Tanak- the Hebrew Scriptures were saying.

But the Scribes and Pharisees were ripping people off and using religion to commit injustices against people that benefited them.

Matthew 23:4-7

They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do everything to be seen by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. 6 They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by people.

Matthew 23:23-24

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, and yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law —

justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These things should have been done without neglecting the others.

Jesus comes criticizing the Pharisees and Scribes for using religion to build themselves up, while they burden others and neglect what the Jewish law REALLY teaches- justice mercy and faithfulness.

Or look at this...

John 2:13-16

13 The Jewish Passover was near, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and he also found the money changers sitting there. 15 After making a whip out of cords, he drove everyone out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. 16 He told those who were selling doves, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace! "

The money changers had overtaken the court of the Gentiles in the Temple. The court of the Gentiles was intended for people who had heard about the God of the Jews and were curious- while they couldn't enter into the inner courts of the temple- there was a place for them to come and see what this YHWH of the Jews was like. Instead, the religious people had turned the Court of the Gentiles into a place where they were taking financial advantage of people. People were paying exorbitant prices for animals to sacrifice for the sake of convenience. So what was supposed to be an experience for outsiders to see the goodness of GOD- turned into another display of injustice. And Jesus was having none of it.

There's more...and this goes directly to Christians and the church.

In the book of Revelation at the end of the Bible- the church had been around a few decades. And Jesus appears in a vision to John- who is imprisoned on an island awaiting his execution.

Jesus tells John to write 7 letters to 7 churches. Almost all of the letters are critical of the churches- telling the CHURCH to repent- and start playing the music correctly.

Revelation 2:5

Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Revelation 2:14a, 16

But I have a few things against you.... So repent! Otherwise, I will come to you quickly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. --

Here's my point. Jesus was never ok with any kind of injustice- especially that done in the name of a faithful, merciful, loving God.

Back to 1)

...and over the centuries- Christians that listened to him...weren't ok with Injustice either.

It was though reading the Scripture that Martin Luther stood up to the injustices of the Catholic church in 16th Century.

It was the Christian ethic that drove William Wilberforce to dismantle the slave trade in the 19th century.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Corrie ten Boom and her family stood up to Hitler, led a resistance against the Nazis- not from some arbitrary ethic- rather from their deep Christian convictions.

And Martin Luther King was a pastor that appealed to the Scripture and the hope offered in Jesus- when he shared his Dream with the world...as he led the church to call out the injustices of the church during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

All of these people were folks who knew what the music was supposed to sound like... and instead of abandoning the what was written...they held it up...and played it beautifully themselves...to expose the awful evil karaoke that was happening around them.

TRANSITION:

...and even today- through the #metoo and #churchtoo movement- the failures of the sexual revolution that was supposed to offer freedom from oppression- only offered powerful people more power to exploit the weak. The truth is- in order to condemn the sexual abuse brought to the forefront in those movements- you need a uniquely Xian ethic. ...Let me show you..

2) Critique of the church's injustice assumes truth that only Christianity brought to the table.

There are a set of ideas that almost all of us would agree to without even thinking about it.

For example...

All human beings are equal.

Sexual relationships should always have consent.

The powerful should not abuse the weak.

You should never treat someone without kindness just because of their race, gender, or socio-economic standing.

Don't be quick to judge others before you take a good look in the mirror.
(AKA you better check itself, before you wreck yourself)

I could go on.

The point is...most of us just hold those truths as self-evident...like our Declaration of Independence says.

We would all stand up and say "You have certain rights" just because you are human.

The truth is- first- you can travel to certain places today and they would say- "What are you talking about- of course humans aren't all equal. Women are of a lower class, then certain sects and races are of a lower class- in fact its not humanity that judges whether you have dignity- its the family or race or gender you are born into."

Aristotle- the great greek philosopher said there were some people who were born to be slaves- by their nature.

The Roman society was set up to run on power. The idea that everyone was equal would have been incredibly foreign to them. If you uttered something about Human Rights to a first century Roman- or someone from ancient Babylon they would have said "HUH?"- primarily because they didn't speak English...but even if you spoke in the Babylonian tongue or in Greek or Latin... they would not have understood the concept.

Take views on sex, for example. There would have been virtually no concept of "consent" in those cultures. The rule was- the powerful decide who they would have as a partner... including what we would call the abuse of people deemed as slaves.

In these cultures there was a hierarchy of subjection.

But it was the doctrine of the image of God that contradicted this.

Gen 1:26-27

And notice- in the image of God- Male and female are equal. All humanity is deserving of dignity and honor. And instead of subjection to one another- humans together- are giving Dominion. All humans are to care for the world that God has entrusted to us.

There's a story about Jesus in the NT where someone asks him about paying taxes to Casear.... (WHOS IMAGE....GIVE to CAESAR what is CAESAR and to GOD what is GODS)

IOW- have your coing, Caesar- but you are made in Gods image...and so is the lowest slave girl that you think you are so different from.

Or look at what Paul writes to the Corinthian church about sexual relations

1 Corinthians 7:4

A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does

This would have been outrageous to the Roman culture to which it was spoken. But this is, where consent gets its basis.

Or what about the Golden Rule.

Matt 7:12

Before this there were silver rules- about NOT harming people...but Jesus takes it a step further and says actively DO TO OTHERs how you want to be treated.

Before Xianity came along- this would have been a foreign concept.

Or Jesus telling people not only to not retaliate to your enemies- but treat them with kindness.

Back to 2)

Here's the point. The injustices that the church has committed over the centuries- can only be called out with the Ethic that Jesus brings to the table. And- when you don't like something Xians do- and you call them on it...its not like you are just asking them to stick to what they believe. You aren't just asking them for consistency.

No.

You actually agree that everyone is equal.

You agree and hold dear that consent should always be followed in sexual relationships- and it shouldn't be an act of power over the weak.

You agree that people should be held to a standard.

But what you may have never recognized is that you don't have any of those ethics without Jesus Christ. You are appealing to...appreciating...and agreeing to Jesus' ethic when you hold the church to that standard.

Matt 7:2

So if Jesus is right about all those things- then will you also live by his ethic on judgment. The standard you hold others to...you will be held to yourself.

And here's the problem we all have. None of us want to live in a society where anything goes. The truth is, like MLK Jr said "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice"

You know- all through Bible- God is taking entire societies...and he puts a people in them...ridiculously sinful and flawed...and by loving them... and revealing himself to them...he undoes huge injustices.

In the OT- primogeniture- the favoring of the older over the younger...he undoes by raising up the younger to be in the position to care for and sacrifice and protect the older.

Slavery and infanticide (the killing of infants based on preference) in the first century Roman culture was rampant. But by raising up a church to meet together to worship Jesus as equals... and by going out in the streets and garbage dumps and picking up babies left for dead- God used the church to reverse the entire ethic of a society.

Even now- the society you live in today would be COMPLETELY different without Jesus.

All the freedoms and ethics we take for granted- like equality, mutual kindness and consent- those aren't here without Jesus.

...and yet- for our society now- what commands and teachings of Jesus do we overlook and throw to the wayside. In other words, we'll march and scream and demand justice that benefits us...but when Jesus' commands seem to get in the way of how we want to live...well- those we don't need.

From all of the parts of Jesus' sexual ethic that we overlook, while we take the idea of consent to heart...listen...we will be judged for that. You will be judged for that. You can't take PART of what Jesus says- and throw the rest away.

So what are we going to do...? Well...I have good news

3) Christianity has never been about perfect morality. Its always been about flawed & sinful people receiving something they didn't deserve.

We think we're free when we pick and choose our own ethic. But we're actually enslaved. Controlled by our flesh. We're just like the Pharisees and Hitler and all other people who have selectively said to God- I like this part of what you say...but this other part I'll do it my way.

A sexual ethic is just one of many ways we do that.

The metoo movement and the church too movement both exposed that people in and out of the church had bought the lie that using power for pleasure would be freeing. But it broke and hurt all of us...particularly the victims.

The truth is...that that was the outplaying of the Sexual Revolution. Sure...the Handmaids tale tells you one version of it "Watch out if the Pharisees get power"...but the truth is on the other side- that No Strings Attached sex without meaning has made us feel...meanginliness...with not strings attached to anything transcednat or beautiful. Instead of be fruitful and multiply...we've just created our own ethic...anything two or more people agree to do together won't hurt anyone.

Ephesians 2:1-2

This verse says we are enslaved by that sin.

We're empty. We're broken. Because God created us...and he knows how we work. So what he says about sex...or anything...is what how we were created to flourish.

We're enslaved.

Ephesisans 2:4-5

But the good news is that all of the heroes throughout history are flawed. the only one that wasn't= Jesus himself.

God...

Fully human — dying death he didn't deserve.
Taking the judgment.

Making us alive.

Ephesians 2:8-10

We can't boast...and now we can step humbly into his good works.

Christians aren't Christians because of what they have done...but because of in whom they have put their trust.

Yes- the church should be held to a standard. But all of humanity should be held to a standard.

And without Jesus- you have to answer for that failure.

Will you honestly say that you know where your ethic and sense of Justice is grounded. And you can't honestly look at history and the Bible...and locate it in anything other than what God himself revealed in Jesus.

So now- will you honestly take the next step to follow him with your whole life. Otherwise- you will be judged by God's standard...and you know...you won't pass the test.

Come get what none of us deserve. The everlasting love God in Christ.