

IS CHRISTIANITY LOSING?

The world has dramatically tilted. It is a culture in decay and demise, deserving what likely lies ahead for it. There will be payday someday.

In the days we are living in, there seems to be a downward spiral as far as the morality of man is concerned and as far as that goes, the church seems to be going in a tailspin.

In Europe and the United States, church attendance is steadily decreasing. Public schools, universities, and colleges are secular. Politically it is incorrect to say anything that is connected to Christ. However, Christianity is exploding in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Australia. Both, religious belief and skepticism, are on the rise. We know for sure, that our own culture is divided. People who used to belong to the main line denominations inherited that membership. Many people now, do not know anything about Christ. We can't assume people already know something about Christianity.

Many today, are hostile to Christ and Christianity. If one tries to find out another's world view, he might find out that his own faith can be severely attacked. Hard doubts may be thrown at Christianity, so we must be prepared to give the answer and hope to anyone who would challenge Jesus Christ and His truth.

If you looked at the statistics of the exponential growth of the Muslim religion and the new atheism with all their top selling books currently, we could be less than optimistic about Christianity. Politically, we feel estranged for the most part with so many liberals who run the government. What do we make of all this and what of the future for the church? Are we losing the war as we seem to be losing many battles? There are many casualties in this army we fight with. How do we deal with our own doubts and struggles? How can we be strong in a hostile world? What we are going to look at, are some of the doubts and questions that people have problems with, concerning Christianity. Our goal is that we would be more adept in engaging with the culture and sharing the truth of Christ and the gospel. We have hope to give to a lost and dying world.

1. EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Jesus made claims that were absolutely exclusive and unique from any other religion in the world. Jesus made some remarkable claims and we believers proclaim those also. This statement of one way can make people very angry. It is very revolutionary today to even say there is only **one way**---Acts 4:1-12, John 14:6

These statements are absolute and logical. It is about the life of Jesus, His death, and resurrection. There is no other person qualified. Peter, in chapter 4 confirmed the content of scripture. Revelation from God, to Christians, is indispensable. Scripture is our authority.

THERE JUST CAN'T BE ONE RELIGION

These people know other religions exist and you are being very arrogant

if you say that your belief is the only way. How can you say that, is what they are thinking.

It is very fashionable today to believe all religions are beautiful and are one and the same. They would say that Hinduism and Islam, and Judaism, and Christianity and Buddhism are the same. But the Buddhist doesn't believe in the eternal soul as the Hindu does believe in the eternal soul. That is a major difference. Islam believes in one god but Hinduism believes in millions of gods. That is a major difference. Christianity differs with all these religions in every area and it is built around Christ as no other belief does.

Suppression of it by the state

Through the ages, governments have tried to exterminate religion because it conflicted with the political agenda. In the 20th century Soviet Russia, Communist China, and Nazi Germany tightly controlled religious practice to stop it from taking away the power of the state. Alister McGrath has said that the greatest intolerance and violence of that century were practiced by those who believed that religion caused intolerance and violence. Literally millions were killed.

Socially condemned

All religions are valid and teach basically the same thing

They say that doctrinal differences are superficial and all teach the same and they all believe in the same God. They say that God is an all loving spirit in the universe. Doctrine is not important, but Buddhism doesn't believe in a personal God at all. But the problem with this belief, is that this is a doctrine itself to say they are all the same.

Each religion sees a part of spiritual truth

This is about the elephant and several blind men walking beside it and they each touch it. One held the trunk and described it, the other touched it's leg and described it, another touched its side and described it. Each felt only part of the elephant but not the entire elephant. They compare this to all the religions but the story is told from the point of view of someone who was not blind. How could you know that each blind man only sees part of the elephant unless you claim to be able to see the whole elephant? How could they know no religion can see the whole truth unless they have a superior knowledge that they just claimed that none of the religions have?

Religious belief is too culturally conditioned to be truth

All religions are equally true is what you used to hear. Now you will probably hear that all religions are equally false. They say all spiritual claims are the product of our particular culture of the time. How can one judge about spiritual reality over another. Everyone belongs to a community that teaches certain truths and discourages others. They say it is impossible to judge right or wrong in competing beliefs. They say no belief can be held as universally true for everyone. But that is a claim in itself and that cannot be true. Everyone makes truth claims and its hard to weigh them, but we have no alternative but to try to do so.

Arrogant to insist your religion is right

This is a contradiction too. This would be arrogance to say that. Skeptics believe that any exclusive claims to a superior knowledge of truth cannot be true. But this in itself is a belief. It assumes God is unknowable, or that He is not a God of wrath and only a God of love, or He is an impersonal force rather than a God who reveals Himself in scripture. They make exclusive and absolute claims when they do this and can be called arrogant also, then.

The truth of the matter is that Christianity insisted that there was only one true God, the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Their lives and practices were welcoming to the culture that marginalized them. They mixed people with different races and classes. The Greeks and Romans despised the poor, but Christians gave generously, even to those of other faiths. Women had a low status. Christianity brought equality to them. During terrible plagues, Christians cared for the sick and dying in the city, even at the cost of their own lives. At the very heart of their faith was a man who died for His enemies, praying for their forgiveness. They could not act in violence and oppression toward the enemies. The Greeks and the Romans were supposedly tolerant in that everyone had their own gods but their culture was brutal to the less fortunate.

2. HOW COULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

Many will say, "I won't believe in a God who allows suffering, even if he exists. Maybe he exists or maybe he doesn't, but if he does, he can't be trusted."

In 2004 there was a tsunami that killed more than 250,000 people. The newspapers had letters from people all over, asking "Where was God? If God is God, He's not good. If God is good He's not God." That was an effort to disprove the existence of God.

Could it mean evidence for God? Just because you can't imagine a good reason why God would allow suffering doesn't mean that there is no God. If our minds can't plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, then there can't be any. This is blind faith. Many assume that if there were good reasons for the existence of evil, they would be accessible to our minds. This argument can't hold water. The story of Joseph is a good example of evil and suffering. If God had not allowed suffering, Joseph would never have been such a powerful agent for social justice and healing. Many identify with this story of Joseph and they admit that what they needed for success in life came to them through painful experiences. God could have good reasons for all suffering even though we don't know why. Suffering cannot disprove God's existence. It's still a problem for believers in the Bible. But it's even more of a problem for unbelievers. C.S. Lewis had originally rejected the idea of God because of evil. But then he realized that evil even more problematic for his atheism. He thought it was unjust, but then he realized that he got his idea of just and unjust from somewhere. What was he comparing this universe with when he called it unjust?

We all should not suffer and die and be hungry or oppressed. But evolution depends upon that. On what basis does the atheist judge the natural world to be wrong and unjust? He must assume a standard to make this judgment and it is outside the natural.

Suffering is a problem for everyone. The unbelievers have just as much problem explaining it as do believers, actually more. So to say I can't believe in a God who allows it, is a mistake.

Christians can say Romans 8:28 means all things work out for the good even when horrible things happen such as death. God came to earth to put Himself on the hook of human suffering. He experienced the greatest depths of pain. Though Christianity doesn't provide the reason for each painful experience, it provides a resource for going through the pain and suffering with hope and courage rather than despair.

Jesus was profoundly shaken by what was going to take place. Mark 14:33-34, Luke 22:44, Matthew 27:46 he suffered physically on the cross by slow suffocation. But the sin that was put on Him is unimaginable.

3. ISN'T THE CHURCH RESPONSIBLE FOR INJUSTICE?

Many are against Christianity because of personal disappointment with the church. They had bad experiences.

Character Flaws If Christianity is the truth then why are there so many Christians living better lives than Christians? The average professing Christian has many flaws. There are many church splits. Many Christian leaders have had moral failures. Some non-Christians seem to live better lives than Christians. The truth is, is that we can only have a relationship with God only by grace. Our moral efforts, goodness are feeble and weak. The church is a hospital for sinners. By looking at certain Christians, one could say that Christianity isn't worth much. You could compare an unbeliever's action with a believer's actions and see sometimes that the unbeliever may look better. Maybe the unbeliever is more disciplined and controls anger better. Imagine someone who has just become a Christian who had a broken past and the character had changed significantly, nevertheless they were less secure and self-disciplined than someone who was well-adjusted and didn't need religion. Unless you know the starting points and life journeys of each person, you would think that the unbeliever is better off. But the ones who have had a hard life recognize their need. They are weak and they know they need God. Many others may not know that need.

Religion and Violence Why has the church supported war over the years?

Fanaticism Why would I want to be around self-righteous fanatics?

Some change so radically and quickly when they are born again that their friends don't want to be around them. Their views on movies, television, politics, religions seem to be intolerant and self-righteous. They might tend to overreact or become Pharisaical so they need to be fanatically humble and sensitive. Loving and forgiving as Christ is.

John 8:7 Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Mark 10:43-45---servant of all

4. HOW COULD A GOOD GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

"God is no more than a primitive deity who must be appeased with pain and suffering."

"I doubt the existence of a judgmental god who requires blood to pacify His wrath."

Most are appalled that there would be a hell where God would put people forever.

It seems unfair that there is a God that will punish. People believe in their personal rights.

Can this kind of God exist?

How could He be a God of love? If God is loving and perfect, he should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn't get angry.

God's wrath flows from His love. Psalm 145:17-20

The human impulse to make violent offenders pay for their crimes is almost an overwhelming one.

Luke 16:24-31---Rich man and Lazarus The rich man seems to be blind to what has

happened. He expects Lazarus to be his servant. He doesn't ask to get out of hell but he blames God that He didn't give Him enough information about the afterlife. In hell there is increasing isolation, denial, delusion, and self-absorption.

Rom 1;24 God gives them what they want, including freedom from Him

5. HASN'T SCIENCE DISPROVED CHRISTIANITY?

Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris write that science has made belief in God unnecessary.

"You can't be intelligent and still hold religious beliefs." The God Delusion

Hitchens says that religion is evil and poisonous. You are being preprogrammed to believe in God. But these guys don't interact with the fact of the resurrection of Christ.

Are miracles impossible?

Does science conflict with Christianity?

Does evolution disprove God's Word?

6. FAILURES OF THE CHURCH

Many have tried church and found it wanting. The church must listen to the warnings.

The early church faced struggles we face today. There was a whole list of sins in the epistles. There was bickering, distrust, sexual problems and even murder.

Even in the OT there was sin in the patriarchs such as Abraham, or David. Etc.

Our weaknesses stalk our lives. But we have the scriptures to direct our lives. We will not reach perfection here but we can find healing and wholeness. We must be

aware of our shortcomings. We should be gracious and forgiving of those who fall short. We must understand how far we are from God's intentions of conforming us into the image of Christ. We must teach people how to think correctly.

Why are so many leaving? Many have renounced the Christian faith. Some have gone to a gay life style. Some have fallen into adultery. Some are just disillusioned.

Disappointments—They find Christianity intellectually untenable in an age of reason.

Many are honestly asking questions. Many are finding themselves trying to survive the high seas of their faith journey without chart or compass. Ravi Zacharias says "Is

Christianity a mindless game in which we are hurled into the storms of life with false assurances, or are the instructions we have been given so detailed that we can anticipate what the storms of belief will be like, know who is in control, and what to do when we reach solid ground? In the end, rather than it being Christianity that has failed, could it be that we will be startled to find out it is the church that has failed, not Christ?

God does not disappoint us. We often disappoint Him and ourselves. There is a road to recovery." We have a rudder and sail we have been given and, most important, to the Captain of this ship called life." Zacharias

Struggles for security

Struggle with pain and suffering and brokenness

7. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CULTURE

Humility, tolerance, and relevance

Making a difference

People struggle with failures and mistakes and stumble. But the struggles are to be addressed by God's Word. We are not God, but we are to reflect the God we worship.

Christianity has not failed you; God has not failed you. The church may fail you, but it is made up of broken people who are not perfect and they cannot fulfill your life. We don't always live up to our standards and to the beauty of our Savior. Without the Savior there is no one to save you from yourself. He loves you unconditionally and guides you through the turbulent waters of life. He gives strength and courage.

We are to teach people how to apply the scriptures to their own lives and impact society. Christianity changes the heart of people so we begin to think God's thoughts and act in accordance with His character. We are to sense the heart of God and lead people to God, not to build big churches and tickle their ears.

We are to proclaim the glories, supremacies and excellencies which are derived from the triune God. He makes all the difference.

If you think Christianity is failing you, either look at Christ Himself and trust Him to carry you through to a place of contentment and victory, or turn your back on the Savior using the failures of the church to justify your unbelief and face a meaningless purposeless existence without any guide to bring you into a future in the presence of God and to be brought under the scourge of a freedomless worldview that imposes its belief on all.

The light of Christ will carry you through and put your feet on the solid ground of truth and hope. One day He will say, Well done good and faithful servant.