

Sunday Morning Series

THE
GREAT
QUESTIONS



5 Points Today

1. How we can agree with them
2. A definition of “Hypocrisy”
3. Understanding some misunderstandings
4. How they are agreeing with Jesus
5. How they are beneficiaries of Christianity



Hasn't Christianity Done More Harm Than Good?

I can't believe in a religion that has so many hypocrites.



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From George Barna:

- According to a survey in 1996, 85% of Americans who had no religious commitment still viewed Christianity favorably.
- Thirteen years later, in 2009, only 16% of young ‘outsiders’ had a favorable impression of Christianity.
- From a 2020 survey, non-Christians, meanwhile, are inclined toward indifference (39% no impact) or more willing to see harm in churches’ local contributions (8% very negative, 10% somewhat negative).



1. We can agree that Christians have done harm.

In many cases, Christians have done poorly, and have even done unspeakable evil.



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- Sexual abuse of children.
 - Self-aggrandizement and arrogance.
 - Greed, materialism, and exploitation of donors.
 - Adultery and other sexual sins.
- ...Even among pastors, priests, and other church leaders.

And...

- The Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the slave trade.



2. A definition of “hypocrisy”

More *pretense* than *repentance*.



The Greek word *hupocrātās*
meant “actor.”



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Everyone fails to follow their own moral code.

To fail is not the same as hypocrisy.

Hypocrites are those who pretend
to be something they are not.



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“I am a hypocrite if I don’t apply my own standard to myself once I’ve broken it, but I am not a hypocrite if I own up to my error and make amends.”

—John Hopper, *Questioning God*



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3. Understanding some *misunderstandings* about the Christian faith.

- Not based on the performance of Christians.
- Not just a “profession.”
- Not about perfection.



Christianity is not based on the performance
of Christians, but...

On the **person of Christ.**



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Being a Christian is not just a “profession”—
“Yeah, I’m a Christian,” but...

Actually **possessing** a relationship with
Christ through faith.



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The Christian life isn't a life of perfection.

Rather, it's...

A life of **progression**, of **life-change**.



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God isn't as interested in making “nice” people
as He is in making “new” people.

—Tim Keller



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So...

- Christianity is not based on the performance of Christians but on the person of Christ.
- Profession is not always possession.
- The Christian life is not about perfection, but rather progression.



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4. To object to hypocrisy is to agree with Jesus.

- In Matthew 23, Jesus calls the religious leaders “hypocrites” 6 times
- “They preach but do not practice...and do all their deeds to be seen by others.”
- Jesus calls them “blind guides,” “blind fools,” “blind men,” “serpents” and “a brood of vipers.”
- “White-washed tombs”... “**outwardly** appearing righteous to others, **but within** are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”



It would be a shame
to let a point ***on which you agree***
come between you.



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Although some Christians have behaved badly,
and no Christian is perfect...

5. Christians have also done a great deal of good.



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Compassion for the poor, the elderly, and the weak.



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“Plato thought that in order to be worth rearing, children must be “malleable, disposed to virtue and physically fit”.—Darrel W. Amundsen in *On Moral Medicine*

If they did not prove themselves worthy, parents would “properly dispose of [them] in secret, so that no one will know what has become of them.” (Plato in *Republic*)

Aristotle thought defective children should be exposed—that is, discarded at rubbish tips, abandoned on hillsides, thrown down wells or drowned in rivers. “As to exposing or rearing the children born, let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared.” (Aristotle in *Politics*, Book 7)



“Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) identified the culprit in his book *The Anti-Christ*. The problem, according to the German philosopher, was the poison of pity. ‘Pity on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of selection.’”



“Christianity has taken the part of all the weak, the low, the botched; it has made an ideal out of antagonism to all the self-preserved instincts of sound life.”

—Friedrich Nietzsche



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Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."



“What could possibly be an image or likeness of God? If you had asked someone from the ancient Near East, they might have answered, ‘The king’. After all, the deities were themselves despotic tyrants.

“If you had asked a Greek philosopher, ‘What images God?’ they might have replied, ‘The universe’. Plato imagined that the world we see is a shadowy image cast by an original divine light.



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But with the Bible in hand, the answer to the question “What images God?” is extraordinary: US.

... Here, on page one of the Bible, lies a treasure more valuable than all the world because we are said to be more valuable than all the world. This is a status given not according to a person’s strength, rank, race or gender but simply on account of belonging to the human family.”

—Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe*



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Because *all people* are valuable, even the dying,
Christians built **Hospitals**.



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“325—The Council of Nicaea (the same council that affirmed the Nicene Creed) decreed that wherever a cathedral existed, there must be a hospice, a place of caring for the sick and poor.—John Ortberg, in *Who Is This Man?* (p. 40).



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“St. Ephraim the Syrian (A.D. c. 306-373), when the city of Edessa was ravaged by plague, established hospitals open to all who were afflicted.

St. Basil the Great (A.D. 329-379) founded a hospital in Cappadocia with a ward set aside for the care of lepers, whom he nursed with his own hands.

St. Benedict of Nursia (A.D. c. 480 – c. 547) opened a free infirmary at Monte Cassino and made care of the sick a paramount duty of his monks.



“In Rome, the Christian noblewoman and scholar St. Fabiola (d. A.D. c. 399) established the first public hospital in Western Europe and—despite her wealth and position—often ventured out into the streets personally to seek out those who needed care.

St. John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), while patriarch of Constantinople, used his influence to fund several such institutions in the city.”



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1836— A Lutheran pastor in Germany named Theodor Fliedner trained a group of mostly peasant women to nurse the sick. This led to a movement of hospitals all over Europe, and this inspired a young woman named Florence Nightingale to give her life to care for the sick. She asked that after she died she wanted her grave to be marked with simply a cross with her initials; she wanted to serve with no acclaim.”—Ortberg, John. *Who Is This Man?* (p. 40).



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“Today, if you need first aid, look for a white cross on a green background—the internationally recognised sign. If you’re in a crisis, it’s the ‘Red Cross’ which millions turn to...The good Samaritan lives. In fact nowadays the good Samaritan is assumed. **But there’s nothing natural about this. Nature is ‘red in tooth and claw’, as the poet Tennyson put it. Compassion comes from another realm. It is, in a real sense, ‘super-natural’.**”

Scrivener, Glen. *The Air We Breathe* (p. 59).



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Education



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“Monasteries became places of great learning. A Jesus-follower named Benedict collected so many ancient manuscripts that he became known as ‘the godfather of libraries.’ ...The first university was established in Paris around the twelfth century, and Oxford and Cambridge began in the thirteenth. (The motto of Oxford University is from Psalm 27:1: “The LORD is my light.”) Then came universities in Rome, Naples, Vienna, and Heidelberg.”

—John Ortberg. *Who Is This Man?* (pp. 65-66).



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“All but one school started before the American Revolution was begun to serve the Jesus movement. Ninety-two percent of the first 138 colleges and universities founded in America were begun for followers of this uneducated, itinerant, never-wrote-a-book Carpenter.”

—Ortberg, John. Who Is This Man? (p. 67).



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Including...

- Harvard—1636 by Puritan Calvinists
- William and Mary—1693 by Anglicans
- Yale—1701 by Presbyterians and Congregationalists
- Princeton—1746 by Presbyterians
- Brown—1764 by Baptists
- Rutgers—1766 by Dutch Reformed Church
- Dartmouth—1769 by Congregationalists



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Science and the Scientific Method



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“A central feature of the ancient Greek worldview was the idea of fate and necessity. Aristotle saw all things unfolding by an all-determining reason. Neither the gods nor humanity nor the world were free. ... So, on a question like “What shape are the orbits of the planets?” Aristotle would answer, Circular, because the circle is the most perfect shape and, in all the cosmos, heavenly bodies are the closest to perfection. ... Investigating the world with our senses is not that reliable—after all, our senses can deceive us. ... All this made the Greeks brilliant at reasoning and indifferent to experimentation.”—Glen Scrivener, in *The Air We Breathe*. p. 131



“I am not arguing that the European trust in the scrutability of nature was logically justified even by its own theology. My only point is to understand how it arose. My explanation is that the faith in the possibility of science, generated antecedently to the development of modern scientific theory, is an unconscious derivative from medieval theology.”

— Alfred North Whitehead, in *Science and the Modern World*



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Copernicus: “To know the mighty works of God, to comprehend ... the wonderful workings of His laws, surely all this must be a pleasing and acceptable mode of worship to the Most High.”

Galileo: “The glory and greatness of Almighty God are marvelously discerned in all his works.”

Kepler: “Geometry is unique and eternal, a reflection of the mind of God. That men are able to participate in it is one of the reasons why man is an image of God.”

Newton: “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an Intelligent Powerful Being.”



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Freedom, Equality, and Human Rights



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“Nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker... Justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior.” (Plato, 428–438 BC)

“For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.” (Aristotle, 384–322 BC)



“No Roman—indeed, no ancient—would have quibbled with the views expressed above. And yet they are the very reverse of our modern thinking. We consider “justice” to mean the equalizing of persons. The classical world considered justice as the enforcement of inequality; that was what nature intended.”

—Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe*



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Around 1740— John Wesley and George Whitefield preached the social responsibilities of Christian piety:

Influenced William Wilberforce, along with Fowell Buxton and Zachary Macaulay. . . all evangelicals who were converted under Wesley's ministry and led the ending of slavery in the British Empire

1772 – Slavery was judicially excluded from England, 14,000 freed.

1792 – Conditions aboard slave ships were regulated by law.



1808 – The English slave trade was abolished.

1831 – All European slave trade abolished.

England spent 15 million pounds for enforcement, even making payments to Spain and Portugal to stop the trade.

1833 – Slavery abolished in British Empire.

45 million pounds paid in compensation to free 780,933 slaves.



““Most legal systems in the world today are based on a belief in human rights. But what are human rights? Human rights ... like God and heaven, are just a story that we’ve invented. They are not an objective reality. They’re not a biological fact about Homo sapiens. Take a human being, cut him open, look inside; you will find the heart, the kidneys, neurons, hormones, DNA. But you won’t find any rights. The only place you find rights is in the stories that we have invented and spread ... over the last few centuries. They may be very positive stories, very good stories. But they are still just fictional stories that we’ve invented.”

—Yuval Noah Harari in *What Explains the Rise of Humans*, Ted Talks



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“The God story and the equality story stand or fall together. If we feel that life is sacred, that every human possesses an inviolable dignity and equality, and that no one deserves to be trampled down simply because they are smaller or weaker or poorer, then we are standing on particularly biblical foundations. There is a thread running from Genesis through the New Testament to our 21st-century humanist convictions.

—Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe*



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6. Don't let others prevent your coming to Christ.



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“One soul in the whole creation you do know; and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands. If there is a God, you are, in a sense, alone with Him. You cannot put Him off with speculations about your next door neighbors or memories of what you have read in books. What will all that chatter and hearsay count (will you even be able to remember it?) when the anesthetic fog which we call ‘nature’ or ‘the real world’ fades away and the Presence in which you have always stood becomes palpable, immediate, and unavoidable?”—C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.184



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Conclusion and Encouragement



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