

Every day, my social media feeds are full of posts that point out some immoral act of a church leader, or hateful rhetoric being given by someone proclaiming to be a Christian. For my next series, I would like to address some of the more common criticisms I see. Things like “Christians are intolerant”, or “Christians hate (insert minority group here)”, or “Christians force their beliefs on everyone”. We see these every day. But why do they seem to be on the increase? And are these criticisms valid?

Why People Criticize Christianity

They Don't Know What Christianity Teaches

The West has become largely ignorant about what Christianity teaches. The reasons for this are many and multi-layered, and I won't get into all of them here. But terms like salvation, repentance - even God, sin, love and tolerance - have lost their original meaning. In a lot of conversations, we might be using the same words, but working with different definitions.

Everyone in America has heard a Bible verse or two in their lifetime. Whether they are a believer or not. The problem with figuring out Christianity this way is that, apart from some of the passages in Proverbs, verses aren't meant to stand on their own. You have to understand the other context clues. In order to understand how Jesus could say “turn the other cheek” (as if to be pacifists) and also tell his apostles to carry swords on their journeys requires more effort than just reading a single Bible verse. But, most people - even some Christians - aren't interested in trying to make all the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

Continuing Misrepresentation

Because people don't want to take the time to understand what Christianity teaches, the only way they develop a picture of Christianity is through news stories, internet postings, TV and movies. The problem is most of the people responsible for producing this content don't know what Christianity teaches either! Their job is to keep people watching. So, they trot out the most extreme versions of the side they disagree with. Or are loose with the truth for creative purposes. So, Christians often come out portrayed as closed-minded, intolerant, bigoted homophobes who “just don't get it”.

Christians Hold Unpopular Positions

In the Western world, the idea of liberty is paramount among its principles. People want the personal freedom that it promises. But, as is evidenced by current hot topic political issues, what people really want is freedom *without consequences*. Christianity teaches the opposite



of this; we have been given free will, but there are consequences to our choices.

Current hot topics include the definition of marriage, the right to life vs the right to choose, free will - even the ability to know what is objectionably true. Christian stances on these issues have not wavered for 2000 years. Even longer than that if you count Judaism. It hasn't been until recently that society's positions were any different either. But, now that society's views have changed (and Christian teachings have not) Christians are left holding positions that go against the grain and are very unpopular.

Christians Get Christianity Wrong Ourselves

For too many Christians, their knowledge of Christian teachings doesn't go much past Sunday School and a sermon once a week. I will freely admit this used to be me. Many people say they are Christians and don't even attend services regularly. But, understanding the complex issues we face today requires more than sitting in a pew for an hour on Sunday.

A lot of us do the same thing with Bible verses that non-believers do; we use them like one sentence pithy saying to live by but without any context. The Bible tells us all sorts of activities that are considered sinful. We also hear verses about loving our neighbors and not judging others. So, a lot of Christians end up towards one end of the spectrum - either they make it their job of reminding others of their shortcomings or they sit on their hands and say nothing because hey, who are they to judge? Without proper study, it is hard to see how these two positions come together to inform how we can talk to others about sin in a loving way.

How Do We Fix The Problem?

Now that we know we have a problem, how do we go about fixing it? How do we correct the misconceptions and inaccurate image that people have of Christianity? First and foremost we have to know what Christianity teaches. The majority of us don't spend any time outside of the Sunday Sermon learning about what our worldview teaches. We are unprepared to know how to respond to people who do things we don't agree with or people who challenge what we are taught. So, the absolute Number One thing we need to do is learn Christian doctrine. This sets the foundation for everything else that is to come below.

The second thing we need to do may seem rather obvious, but it still needs to be said; we need to live what Christianity teaches. After you've equipped yourself with knowledge, you need to live it out. You need to live a changed life. Trust me - people will notice the change. You need to live a life that is - as Paul puts it - above reproach. Leave them no room to



question your character. When people see you living a changed life, they're going to want some of what you've got.

Now, just living out the gospel isn't always enough. People have questions. And, the majority of people hold different views than us. So, how do we engage with them? The answer is by acting as [Christ's ambassadors](#). And, we have to know how to [make the case for the Christian world view](#) in a way that isn't confrontational, judgemental or condescending.

Finally, we have to understand that we are not going to convince everybody. Some people may have developed objections they think are rational. Some people may have emotional reasons for rejecting Christianity. Others don't want it to be true or just don't care. That's OK. Don't turn your discussions into an [argumentative grappling match](#) of wits. That will do more to hurt your case than help it.

For the next several articles, I will attempt to address some common criticisms by trying to understand why someone may believe it to be true, determine if it is true or not, and then give some guidance on how to address it when the criticism comes up in conversation.

If there are any challenges or criticisms you would like to see addressed, please let me know [here](#) or in the comments below

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