

# God, I have a Question? GOD, IS THE CHURCH STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

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How do you respond to a friend who says: *If Christianity is true, what about all the HYPOCRITES AND ATROCITIES of the church?*

## 1. Recognize THAT ABUSES HAVE HAPPENED

"Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to **pervert the gospel of Christ.**" Galatians 1:7

"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your **sincere and pure devotion to Christ.**" 2 Corinthians 11:3

**Once focus on JESUS is diluted, anything can be rationalized**

## 2. Recall THE BIBLE'S WARNINGS

"**Watch out** for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15-17

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive... unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. **Have nothing to do with them.**" 2 Timothy 3:1-5

**A distinction must be made between the TEACHINGS of Jesus and the ACTIONS of some who have claimed to be Christians**

**Opposition to the atrocities came from CHRISTIANS**

## 3. Reveal POSTIVE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANS

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even **greater things** than these, because I am going to the Father." John 14:12

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:44,45,47

**THEIR GOOD DEEDS LEAD TO GOOD WILL WHICH LEADS TO AN OPENNESS TO THE GOOD NEWS**

**GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH: GOD DOESN'T JUST WANT US TO JUST GO TO CHURCH; HE WANTS US TO REALIZE WE ARE THE CHURCH!**

**BENEFITS OF THE CHURCH THROUGHOUT HISTORY:**

### Human Rights

Christians headed the movements to combat human rights abuses such as infanticide; gladiatorial combat in the Roman Empire; slavery; child labor, etc. (see Luis Palau, *God Is Relevant, New York: Doubleday, p. 177-178*)

### Relief Work

Christians established the first charitable medical hospitals; the first emergency shelters for the homeless; the first homes for orphans; the first humanitarian institutions for the insane; the first ministries to victims of crime; the first outreaches to prisoners, hospital patients, and soldiers; and the first societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals (see Luis Palau, *God Is Relevant, New York: Doubleday, p. 177-178*)

### Women

Christians discontinued practice of veiling; patria potestas (father's right to kill family members); infanticide of female babies; assembly partitions; etc. wage (Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World, p. 120*)

### Labor

Unlike Greco-Roman culture, Christians saw labor as honorable, dignified, a calling, and deserving of a fair wage (Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World, p. 214*)

### Education

Most of the great colleges and universities in the world began as Christian colleges: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, etc. At least 1,210 languages were never written until Christian Bible translators learned the languages and

devised writing for them. (*Beisner, Answers for Atheists, Agnostics, and Other Thoughtful Skeptics, Wheaton: Crossway, 137*)

### Literature

Christian faith motivated and inspired classic works by Augustine, John Bunyan, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Pascal, Solzhenitsyn, Dickens, Milton, Defoe, Tennyson, Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and many more.

### Art and Music

Christian faith inspired musical works by Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Mozart, and many others, and great works of art by da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Rembrandt, etc.

### Resources

**God: The Evidence**, Patrick Glynn

**Questions of Life**, Nicky Gumbel

**The Faith Factor**, Dale Matthews

**God Is Relevant**, Luis Palau

**How Christianity Changed the World**, Alvin J. Schmidt

**The Rise of Christianity; The Victory of Reason; For the Glory of God**, Rodney Stark

**Can Man Live Without God?**, Ravi Zacharias

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## TIME WITH GOD

Memory Verse: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35

### Monday

Which points from the message were helpful to you? Why?

Read Hebrews 10:23-25. In what specific way can you spur another Christian on to love and good deeds? How have others spurred you on?

Why do Christians "give up meeting together"? Who do you know that needs an invitation back to church?

*Thank God for His encouragement today. Think of a Christian you know who has fallen into the habit of skipping church. Ask God to help you invite them back!*

### Tuesday

Read Acts 2:41-47. Too often we think of ways the Church has fallen short of Christ's purpose for her, but here is one example of the Church doing very well. What do you devote yourself to daily?

According to this passage, what do these three thousand converts end up doing?

How does this reflect Jesus' prayer in John 13:34-35? What could you do to help our church be more like this?

*Pray today that Bayside West will grow in its reflection of the joy, faith, and generosity of the early church.*

### Wednesday

Read Acts 20:28-31. In this passage, what does the Apostle Paul warn about? What does he want the church to do?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-8. In this passage, what does Paul warn about? Given this list of vices, what "form of godliness" could these people possibly exhibit? Jannes and Jambres were Pharaoh's magicians. How do they help explain what Paul means by "a form of godliness"?

Why is this so dangerous? Why do you think corrupt leaders have infected churches in spite of repeated warnings like this in Scripture?

*Ask God to help you and to help the church to be on guard against those who want to distract us from a focus on Jesus and His gospel.*

### Thursday

Jesus also warned many times against the corrupting influence of bad leaders in the church. Read Matt. 7:15-23 and Matt. 23:23-28.

Does anything surprise you about Jesus' tone in these verses? How are false prophets like "wolves"?

What would you say Jesus sees as the main evil of the Pharisees? How can Christians keep from falling into the same sin?

Where do you need to be cleansed on the inside, not just the outside?

*Ask God to help us as a church and as individuals to stay far from hypocrisy. Ask Him to help us be cleansed inside, not just outside.*

### Friday

The book of Galatians is one of Paul's first letters, and yet already he is warning the church against leaders who are taking them astray. Read Gal. 1:6-9 and Gal. 5:7-10.

In your opinion, what "distorted gospel" is getting popular in America right now? How does this lead people astray? How could it keep the church from its task of making disciples and loving others in word and deed?

*Ask God to prevent you and the church from believing a distorted gospel. Ask Him to help us stay focused on Jesus.*

### Saturday

*Please finish devotions you may have missed, and please pray for the services this weekend. Thanks!*