



# ANSWERING THE **TOUGH QUESTIONS** ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

IS CHRISTIANITY GOOD?

LESSON #  
**10**

## THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

A growing trend in the United States is the perception that Christianity is immoral, even evil. Many people perceive Christians as hypocritical, hateful, exclusionary, indoctrinated, racist, sexist, oppressive, etc. An example of this perception is how Christians are typically portrayed in movies and by the news media. Incorrect perceptions of Christianity are not new, and we can be encouraged because the church has been successful in reaching others with the gospel in the past despite such false accusations.

## THINK ABOUT THIS

*How can you be a Christian, with its history of oppression, bigotry, and hatred towards other groups of people?*

## TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

GENESIS 1:26A;  
PSALM 37:4;  
ECCLESIASTES 2:10, 12:6,13;  
MATTHEW 25:23;  
JOHN 3:16;  
ROMANS 8:29, 12:1-2;  
1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11;  
2 CORINTHIANS 5:17;  
GALATIANS 3:26, 5:22-24;  
COLOSSIANS 3:11;  
1 TIMOTHY 5:21;  
JAMES 2:8-9;  
1 PETER 3:15, 4:12-14;  
1 JOHN 2:2  
(All Scripture CSB unless otherwise noted)

## THE MAIN IDEA

*This lesson will explore ways to effectively counter some of the mistaken perceptions that abound in today's culture about being a follower of Christ.*

## QUESTION TO EXPLORE

*How can we show that being a follower of Christ is different from what many non-believers have concluded about Christianity?*

## SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

See notes below.



## START HERE

In the first century, Christianity began in a corrupt society that didn't understand its teachings and, as a result, was antagonistic towards it. For example, claims of cannibalism and incest were leveled against the early church because of the Lord's Supper and the practice of calling fellow Christians "brothers and sisters," respectively.<sup>1</sup> We see references to the persecution the church experienced several times in Scripture. For example,

*<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Pet. 4:12-14)*

The early church flourished despite these false allegations when people observed Christians living differently by exuding hope, love, and joy because of their relationship and fellowship with Christ. When their neighbors found this difference appealing, Christians loved them enough to share how they could gain this relationship and fellowship with God. Similarly, Christians today have the greatest effect on culture when we live what we preach.

## CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

*Your child or grandchild comes home from college and tells you that they are rejecting their faith because they have heard from their professors that Christianity is bad/evil. In addition, the people they have met from different backgrounds are nice and moral and don't seem to deserve eternal punishment.*

*How would you respond?*

*This lesson gives you tools to help them see the goodness of being a follower of Christ and that our commission is to love people enough to warn them of the danger they face in eternity.*

---

<sup>1</sup> (n.d.) Persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Wikipedia. Retrieved November 25, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution\\_of\\_Christians\\_in\\_the\\_Roman\\_Empire#cite\\_ref-why\\_28-0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire#cite_ref-why_28-0).



## ADDING CLARITY

Many people, especially young adults, are being taught that Christianity is "oppressive" for the following reasons (among others):

- The Christian lifestyle is restrictive (e.g., concerning human sexuality, women's issues such as assuming roles of authority in the church, abortion, etc.)
- Christianity is exclusionary (e.g., of other beliefs, races, etc.)
- Christianity is unloving (e.g., against homosexuality, gender diversity, etc.) and thus hypocritical.

As a result, they feel justified in their rejection of our faith because they believe Christianity is "bad."

In addition, many in the church struggle with their faith as they encounter people with differing worldviews. They find "good people" (e.g., friendly, kind, considerate, law-abiding, etc.) when they interact with people of different faiths (including those who don't believe in God), different views on moral issues (e.g., human sexuality, gender identities, and roles, etc.), and different races/cultures. As a result, most churchgoers don't share the gospel with others for fear of "triggering" bad feelings/experiences or being accused of being "judgmental." In some cases, they may even walk away from the faith because of persistent doubts.

How do we help people who struggle with these misconceptions, fears, and doubts come to know the truth of the gospel?

## REVIEW AND DISCUSS

### 1. A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST IS TRANSFORMED, NOT RESTRICTED.

When people say that Christianity is "restrictive," they typically believe that being a Christian means being a "killjoy." In other words, the world misconstrues being a follower of Christ as someone who follows a strict set of rules that exclude any "fun" and produces nothing but feelings of guilt and shame. Their misconception about the Christian lifestyle gives us a great opportunity to explain our different perspectives about "fun" and our purpose in life.

The New Living Translation of Romans 12:2 states,



*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

Paul was encouraging the believers in Rome to recognize that being a follower of Christ in this life is a process called "sanctification," where the Holy Spirit works to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Thus, our way of thinking about "fun" is changed from obtaining what we want (e.g., possessions, power, pleasure, etc.), to accomplishing what God wants: *"Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires"* (Ps 37:4). His great love for us as demonstrated by the mercy and grace He gives us produces our love for Him and a desire to do His will through the power of the Holy Spirit. Some speak of this transformation as changing our motivation to serve God from an "ought to" to a "get to" attitude.

Jesus speaks of this change in mindset in Matthew 6:19-21 when he redefines valuables/treasure from the temporal to the eternal:

*<sup>19</sup> "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Paul expands on the nature of heavenly treasures in 1 Corinthians 3:11-16,

*<sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire. <sup>16</sup> Don't you yourselves know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you?*

The implication is that to have any eternal value, "works" must be:

1. Built on a foundational faith in Jesus
  2. Offered in accordance with God's will, as revealed by His Holy Spirit
- According to Paul, any "good" work of Christians done outside of God's will is relegated to the "ash heap" in heaven.



The Book of Ecclesiastes can be described as the account of a great human experiment conducted by God. He gave one man, Solomon, everything the world could provide in excess. He was the wisest, richest, most knowledgeable person who ever lived. He had ultimate control since he was king, he was world-renowned because of his achievements, and he had any woman he wanted. No earthly pleasure he desired was kept from him (Eccl 2:10).

In the end, Solomon concluded that nothing the world had to offer would satisfy the longings of man except God. He states,

*"Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Everything is futile." (Ecc. 12:8)*

*"When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity." (Eccl 12:13)*

Thus, we can help non-believers understand being transformed as a follower of Christ means:

- We can flourish in a lifestyle that has purpose, and we have "fun" pursuing what has eternal value.
- Instead of negative feelings of guilt and shame, our new desire to do God's will produces positive characteristics and behaviors: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"* (Gal 5:22-24).
- We receive praise from God (*"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* Matt 25:23).
- We also want others to flourish in a lifestyle that follows God's design for them, both on earth and in heaven.



## DISCUSS

*During a presidential primary debate in 2000, George W. Bush was asked which political philosopher he most identified with. He promptly replied, "Christ, because he changed my heart!"<sup>2</sup> How does your life show non-believers what flourishing as a follower of Christ looks like? (Possible answers: Various personal responses) How does your life show non-believers what flourishing as a follower of Christ looks like? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)*

### 2. THE TRANSFORMED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST SEES ALL PEOPLE AS GOD SEES THEM.

Genesis 1:26a states that the Trinitarian God sees mankind as made "*in our image, according to our likeness.*" Thus, as we become more like Christ, an essential characteristic of becoming a new creation in Christ is to see all of mankind as we are - precious image-bearers of God. (2 Cor 5: 16-17)

In addition, we see in John 3:16 that "...God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." We also see this all-inclusive concept of God's redemptive plan for mankind in 1 John 2:2 when John proclaims, "*He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.*" (all emphasis added).

Paul elaborates on how this characteristic is ingrained in the worldview of a Christ-follower:

- Col 3:11 - "*In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.*"
- 1 Tim 5:21 - "*I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.*"

---

<sup>2</sup> Berggren, D. J., & Rae, N. C. (2006). Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36(4), 606–632. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2006.02570.x>.



James reiterates that Christians should treat all of mankind the same,

*Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, **Love your neighbor as yourself**, you are doing well. If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (Jas 2:8-9)*

Thus, Christians are called to:

- View all people, even those who don't like us, as potential brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Show no prejudice or favoritism because all image-bearers of God deserve our equal respect, love, and diligence when presenting the gospel.
- Live a lifestyle that exhibits the benefits of an eternal relationship and fellowship with God and reaches out to the lost in love with the gospel.

## DISCUSS

*In recent years, our country has experienced a significant influx of people from other countries. Many do not know anything about Christianity, Jesus, etc. How are you reacting to this development? (Possible answers: Frustration, fear, and/or anger, seeking to understand their beliefs to build a bridge to the gospel, etc.)*

*In what ways might the Holy Spirit be prompting you to value all people as image-bearers of God and see their presence as an evangelistic opportunity? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)*

### 3. THE TRANSFORMED FOLLOWER OF CHRIST LOVES ALL PEOPLE AS GOD LOVES THEM.

When we read the word "love" in the Bible, we must be careful to interpret it correctly. According to C. S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves*, there are four Greek words that are translated as love.<sup>3</sup> The noun *agapē*<sup>4</sup> (ah-GAH-pay) and verb *agapao*<sup>5</sup> (ah-GAH-pao) are best understood as the unconditional love of God for humans, as well as the reciprocal human love for God. In Scripture, the transcendent *agape* love is the highest form of love and is contrasted with *eros* (EH-r-ah-s - romantic love), *philia* (FIL-ah - love for close friends), and *storge* (STOR-

<sup>3</sup> (n.d.). *The Four Loves* [Review of *The Four Loves*]. Wikipedia. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Four\\_Loves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Loves).

<sup>4</sup> (n.d.). *Agape* [Review of *Agape*]. Blue Letter Bible. Retrieved November 24, 2024, from <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g26/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.





gay -familial-type love). GAH-pao) are best understood as the unconditional love of God for humans, as well as the reciprocal human love for God. In Scripture, the transcendent *agape* love is the highest form of love and is contrasted with *eros* (EH-r-ah-s - romantic love), *philia* (FIL-ee-ah - love for close friends), and *storge* (STOR-gay -familial-type love).

The Bible reveals that God loves (agapaō) us so much that He has a redemptive solution for man's sin "problem." Think about what God has done for us:

- God, eternally pure, took on the stain of our sin: *"He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Cor 5:21).
- God, who had always existed, died for us: *"But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8).
- The Trinitarian God, who had always experienced perfect union, experienced separation for us: *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"* (Matt 27:46b).

He experienced all this so we can become His children through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, *"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith..."* (Gal 3:26, NIV). This enables us to experience an eternal relationship and fellowship with God.

God calls us to love other people the same way He has loved us, which means we should also desire an eternal relationship with them.

Loving others as God loves us means we want to share the following:

1. They have a sin problem that separates them from God.
2. If this sin problem remains unresolved, there are dire consequences.
3. There is a solution to this sin problem: Jesus.

Paul demonstrates this love when he reminds the church in Corinth of the wretched state they were in before accepting Christ,

<sup>9</sup> *Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, <sup>10</sup>no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. <sup>11</sup>And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* (1 Cor 6:9-11)

Christians are often referred to as "\_\_\_\_phobic" (e.g., "homo," "islamo," etc.); the implication being that we hate these people because we "condemn" their lifestyles/beliefs out of fear. From the Christian perspective, however, the ultimate objective of sharing the "good news" with them is so they can enjoy eternal fellowship with God. In addition, we also get to love each other for eternity as brothers and sisters in God's family.

Helping people understand (*"with gentleness and respect"* – 1 Pet 3:15) the dire straits they are in without Jesus and facilitating the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts so they





can experience the same fellowship with God that we have is the most loving thing we can do. Thus, we should not be afraid of these people and segregate ourselves from them. We should be afraid for them and interact with them in the hope of gaining an eternal family member.

## DISCUSS

*Envision the following scenario: You are walking down a street lined with houses. As you pass by, you observe a family enjoying dinner together inside one of them. However, you also see their roof is on fire, and you realize that their lives are in danger unless they change what they are doing.*

*What is the most loving action you can take:*

- *Keep on walking and hope for the best?*
- *Beat on their door, warn them of their danger, and show them the path to safety and life?*

*How does the scenario above apply to sharing the gospel with those around us if we truly believe what the Bible says about God's judgment and eternal separation from God in Hell? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)*

## GOSPEL FOCUS

Many people in the United States, including a significant percentage of the younger generations, increasingly reject Christianity because of negative perceptions. Unfortunately, the repercussions of a lifestyle without God are altogether predictable - depression, anxiety, pessimism, loneliness, etc., as reflected in the mental health polling of these groups.<sup>6 7 8</sup> In a world struggling with hopelessness, the hope Christians enjoy from an eternal relationship and fellowship with God

<sup>6</sup> Dunne, M. (2023, December 4). Data Dive: Gen Z Women are Struggling the Most with Stress, Mental Health Issues. Ipsos. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/data-dive-gen-z-women-are-struggling-most-stress-mental-health-issues>.

<sup>7</sup> Shoichet, C. (2023, September 12). Does Gen Z Struggle More with Mental Health than Millennials? New Polling Shows Signs of a Shift. CNN Health. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/14/health/gen-z-mental-health-gallup-wellness-cec/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Dunne, M. (2023, December 4). Data Dive: Gen Z Women are Struggling the Most with Stress, Mental Health Issues. Ipsos. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/data-dive-gen-z-women-are-struggling-most-stress-mental-health-issues>.



through Jesus Christ gives us an amazing opportunity to reach the lost. In a world struggling with hopelessness, the hope Christians enjoy from an eternal relationship and fellowship with God through Jesus Christ gives us an amazing opportunity to reach the lost.

Here are two things Christians can do to help lead people to Jesus:

- Know what you believe so you are "...ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15).
- Live what you believe so you "...present [your body] as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is [your] true worship" (Rom 12:1).

## DISCUSS

*How is your lifestyle different from those around you who don't know Jesus? Do you live in such a way that it might prompt others to inquire about your faith? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)*

## REFLECT ON THE LESSON

The pace of social change in America since 2000 has been historic. This has included a revised definition of marriage, a change in opinion on the number of genders, and an emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and equity training by public and private institutions. There have been changes in public opinion about law enforcement and other institutions, and an increasing plurality of society due to the large influx of immigrants, etc.

These changes may have seemed overwhelming at times. Along with these changes has been a shift from general support for Christianity in American society to increased animosity. We can view these changes pessimistically or see them as new opportunities to show people the advantages of being a Christ-follower in a challenging environment.

## DISCUSS

*What is similar about being a 1<sup>st</sup>-century Christian and a Christian today? (Possible answers: Confusion about what Christians believe; the name "Christian" has a bad reputation; People think badly of you when they learn you are a Christian, etc.)*



---

## RESPOND

As the old pastor's question goes, "If you are accused of being a follower of Christ, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Reflect on how your walk with Christ each day attracts people to Him.

## APPLY

Pray for God to open your eyes to opportunities to use what you have learned in these 10 lessons on apologetics to reach out to the lost around you. Ask the Spirit to work through you and give you the words to say so that individuals He leads you to will respond to His message.

## GENERAL RESOURCES

*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* by Norman Geisler  
*When Skeptics Ask* by Norman Geisler and Ronald Matthew Brooks  
Any *The Case for...* book by Lee Strobel  
*Living in Truth* by Mary Jo Sharp  
*Worldviews* by John Yeats and John Blase  
*Know What You Believe* and *Know Why You Believe* by Paul Little  
*When Critics Ask* by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe  
*Apologetics for a New Generation* edited by Sean McDowell