

Can You Show That Christians Are Moral People?

Introduction. At the conclusion of the first gospel sermon, the scripture says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). The Lord then “added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). At that point, they were considered a Christian by God (Acts 11:26).

But when someone becomes a Christian, their work doesn’t end. You may ask, “Now that I am a Christian, what am I to be like and what am I to do?” Once people became Christians in the New Testament, they became “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17), living blamelessly in the world.

Morality is defined by God, not culture or circumstances. This fixed sense of morality was confirmed all the way back in the Garden of Eden, when God held Adam and Eve accountable for their disobedience in eating of the tree. It took a more specific form hundreds of years later when God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments, which focused their actions on God and man (Exodus 20:3-17; cp. Matthew 22:37). There are important reasons why we have to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

As we finish our “Can You?” series, we come to the final question of how Christians are to be moral people. Just like so many topics that we’ve examined previously, the Bible gives the answer to these questions (1 Peter 3:15).

I. Religion Is Good For Us

- A. The popular narrative of the western world over the last 100 years or so, and especially the last 30 or 40 has been that religion is “poison” as the famous atheist Christopher Hitchens used to argue. They believe that religion creates war and atrocity, judgmentalism and racism, and intolerance and ignorance across the populace. Images of people denying science, hating others, doing violence against people, rule the day.
- B. The thought is that atheism and agnosticism produces a better, more progressive society. Religion, a stunted or even backward trending society.
 1. But the data tells us that the story of the triumph of secularization is just plain false when we ask the question of how religion impacts and affects the cities, neighborhoods, communities, nations, and individuals it exists within.
 2. The overwhelming reality is that religion has a positive, not a negative impact on culture. In fact, it isn’t even close. The atheists are wrong — and by a long shot. Religious people:
 - a) Are the primary source of secular charitable funds that benefit victims of misfortune whatever their beliefs.
 - b) Dominate the ranks of blood donors and other prosocial behaviors.
 - c) Are much less likely to commit crimes.
 - d) Far more likely to donate their money and time to socially beneficial programs and to be active in civic affairs.
 - e) Enjoy superior mental health — are deemed happier, less neurotic, and far less likely to commit suicide.

- f) Enjoy superior physical health — have an average life expectancy more than seven years longer than that of the irreligious.
- g) Read more than their irreligious friends and neighbors.
- h) More apt to marry, less likely to divorce, and report higher degrees of satisfaction with their spouse.
- i) Religious husbands are far less likely to abuse their wives or children. This is of course contrary to the story that religions create systems of oppression in the home because of “male patriarchy”.
- j) Religious fathers are more likely to be involved in youth-related activities such as coaching sports teams or leading Scout troops, etc.
- k) Religious couples enjoy their sexual relationship more, and they are also far less likely to have an affair.
- l) Religious students perform better on standardized achievement tests, are far less likely to drop out of school, obtain better jobs after graduation, and are far less likely to be on unemployment.
- m) Crime rates in the US compared to the decidedly less religious countries of Western Europe are glaringly less in many categories, such as theft and assaults.
 - (1) In 247 studies done between 1944 and 2010, religion has had a positive effect on society in regard to crime, deviance, and delinquency.
 - (2) Urban stats going from present-day back to the 1920s shows that the higher a city’s church membership rate, the lower its burglary, larceny, robbery, assault, and homicide rates.
- C. This challenges the powerful, overarching narrative of our time — that God and religion have no place in society and that the real hope for us is education, technology, the arts, science, etc.
- D. Sure, bad versions and applications of religion are everywhere, and we need to beware. But the idea that religion is bad for society simply isn’t true in a hundred different ways. It isn’t that America needs less religion; it needs better religion.
 - 1. Do you ever wonder why Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., cited the prophets of the Bible in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, versus an atheist manifesto?
 - 2. Because his larger vision, his dream, could only be accomplished by it being built on a foundation of transcendence.

II. A Christian Has To Turn From Sin And Live Righteously

- A. In becoming a Christian, one has to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38).
 - 1. Repentance means a changing of the will which would reflect in a changing of one’s life (Matthew 21:28-29).
 - 2. This means that you cease committing sins which are condemned in the Bible and which are abhorrent to God. You are now a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17) and a “new man” (Ephesians 4:24).
- B. A Christian can’t continue in sin (Romans 6:1, 7).
 - 1. Once you become a Christian, you can’t continue in sin (1 John 1:5-7). “Walk” is a habitual course of action and would apply to any sin (Ephesians 4:1). A

- Christian has tremendous influence (Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:14-15), so we have to be careful where we're seen and what we do.
2. Several types of sins must be stopped (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:14-16):
 - a) Sins of division.
 - (1) These include strife, outbursts of wrath, dissensions, and factions.
 - (2) They are condemned (2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:19-21).
 - b) Sins of the heart.
 - (1) These include covetousness, laziness, pride, anger, hatred, selfish ambition, and envy and jealousy.
 - (2) They are condemned (Romans 1:29-32; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; James 4:6).
 - c) Sins of the flesh.
 - (1) Abortion (Psalm 139:14; Jeremiah 1:5; Proverbs 6:16-19; Romans 1:31; Galatians 5:19-21).
 - (2) Drunkenness and social drinking (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-32; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:3; cp. 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8).
 - (3) Dancing (Galatians 5:19-21; Matthew 5:28; cp. 1 Timothy 6:11).
 - (4) Gambling (Luke 12:42; 16:2; Matthew 7:12; 1 Corinthians 10:24; Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:10; John 8:34; Galatians 5:23).
 - (5) Homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11).
 - (6) Immodest dress (Women [Proverbs 5:18-19; 7:10; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:1-5], Men [Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 5:28; 2 Peter 2:14]).
 - (7) Pornography (Proverbs 6:24-26; Matthew 5:27-28; 6:22-23; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Peter 2:11-12).
 - (8) Sexual immorality (Proverbs 6:32; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 21:8).
 - (9) Tobacco and substance abuse (Ephesians 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 2:11-12; Acts 24:25; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:25-27).
 - d) Sins of the tongue.
 - (1) Profanity and other inappropriate language (Ephesians 4:29; 5:4; Romans 1:29-30; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13; 3 John 10).
 - (2) Lying and cheating (Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21; Ephesians 4:25; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:9).
 3. However, this doesn't mean that a saint will never sin after becoming a Christian (1 John 1:8-10). For the times when we are tempted and sin, God has prescribed what we should do in Acts 8:20-23.

III. "Because Of You"

- A. One of the most powerful passages in scripture is Romans 2:24. Romans 2 is an excellent chapter dealing with hypocrisy. This was a big problem with the Jewish people of the first century. They would boast about their love for God, their reliance on scripture, their memorization, heritage, etc. Yet, the sins they condemned the world for, were the sins they were committing (vv. 21-23).
- B. There are people who are hypocritical in the church. Some people use religion as a means of gain. Some people use religion to shield themselves. Some

people use religion to harm others. Some people are selfish, hateful, hurtful, and mean. Some of those people will never change because they don't want to change. We all agree this is wrong.

1. Joel Raulerson wrote that he began to notice this hypocrisy when he was a teenager working in the fast food industry. From time to time, he would see fellow Christians come in to eat where he worked, and they acted nothing like a Christian. When they should have been striving to be lights to the world and set godly examples, they were treating their fellow man horribly, saying things they shouldn't, and dressing in a manner that was not appropriate to Jesus.
 2. We are supposed to be an example to our communities and try and bring others to serve the Lord. The sad truth was that he heard some "worldly people" justly pointing out when Christians are not acting like they should. Sometimes look like the Jews in Romans 2.
 3. Wouldn't it be so much better to hear, "The name of God is praised among the community because of you"? The same Christians that can destroy the reputation of the church in a community also have the opportunity to bring others to Jesus.
- C. Inside the church, there are also people struggling with these things who are being changed. The gospel of Jesus is powerful and it changes and transforms people from what they were to what they ought to be. It's a slow process and our faults are agonizingly apparent to others and ourselves. The difference here is that change is happening. Growing in faith isn't about the present. What we are right now is not what we are meant to be. We are works in progress.
- D. That you rightly recognize hypocrisy means you recognize things ought not to be this way. You find yourself in agreement with Jesus, who came to earth and showed humanity who we ought to be. You agree with Jesus who called His followers out of the world and sent the Spirit to transform and change them. The gospel is about reforming humanity into what we always should have been. We fell short and God, because He is gracious, has made a way for us to come back and to be remade into what we always should have been.
- E. On a final note, when you do find someone who's living hypocritically, remember that it's the way they've decided to live their life. It's not a reflection on the beauty, power, or effectiveness of the gospel.

Conclusion. History is full of evidence that Jesus changes humanity for the better. The transformation process is working. You can be a part of that with all the difficulties, trials, imperfections, and struggles along the way. You can help people see where they fall short. You can help people see where their love is weak or their thinking is flawed. You can help people become more like what God wants them to be so that we are all being transformed into something glorious together. You can help people become more like Christ.

Or, you can stay where you are, what you are, and who you are. And then things will stay the same. You may feel justified right now in pointing out flaws and faults (and you're not wrong in your assessment). But is that all you want? Do you only want to be right about someone else's imperfection? You'll never be wrong about that. But you will also never get better yourself.

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