

Christianity – immoral? made up? contradictory? manipulative?

**Is the Bible for
thinking people?**

**What about other
religions?**

Speaking up for Jesus

Six 20 minute discussions
suited to Christians or
non-Christians with dramatic
input and questions for
further thought

David Winter • Amy Orr-Ewing • Nicholas King • Steve Chalke • Michelle Moran • Lindsay Urwin

1. Is Christianity blind to reason?



You can only trust the evidence you see . . . science is more reliable than Christian faith! . . . blind faith is really scary . . . People can believe what they like as long as they don't expect thinking people to take them seriously . . . I'd believe God if I could see him!

How can Christians defend themselves against the charge of being anti-reason? In this discussion writer and broadcaster David Winter explains why Christians must heed the advice of 1 Peter 3v15: Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.

Are faith and reason really in opposition? Both are needed to lift people to God. This is the core conviction of so-called 'Christian Apologetics', the reasonable defence of Christian belief. This is not about apologising but about presenting a defence ('apologia' in Greek). Christianity is based on the historical evidence for Jesus which can be reasonably evaluated by any open-minded enquirer.

Unseen things are very important. We see the effects of the wind even if we cannot see it directly. Similarly though God is unseen he can be experienced by faith. If he were visible Christians claim that would affect our freedom to grow in pure love. Faith is the evidence for things unseen (Hebrews 11v1). Even if Christian faith can be spelled R-I-S-K it is always a calculated risk, one based upon the historical figure of Jesus who is said to reveal the unseen God.

Three questions for reflection:

Does speaking up for Jesus go against reason?

Should Christians feel intimidated by objections to their faith?

If God is unseen does that make him any less real?

2. Is Christianity immoral?



'Christianity is about love' Hardly when you look at the misuse of power throughout the ages! ...Think about the Crusades!...Some Christians are really smug, you know 'I'm all right Jack' and they treat non-Christians like second-class citizens! It's so arrogant ...Christianity is all about "Thou shalt not" ...Some Christians can be real "kill-joys".

Are Christians guilty of acting immorally? Amy Orr-Ewing of Zacharias Trust enters a discussion concerned with some of the moral objections served against Christianity. Whilst Christians must admit arrogance over things like the Crusades it is not right to dismiss surely held Christian conviction as arrogance.

Why do Christians oppose so-called mercy-killing? Whilst respecting the rights of individuals in a free society they feel bound to witness to what they believe God has revealed about the dignity of human nature. To welcome this revelation is seen by non-believers as a harsh restriction. To Christians what is at stake is human freedom and flourishing no less. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8v32).

If Christianity says 'Thou shalt not' on occasion it is more 'Thou shalt not'. Prohibitions are welcomed

as from a loving Father who values his children and knows what is best for them. Nevertheless Christian attitudes to sexual activity outside of marriage including homosexual practice can seem arrogant. Rejection of other people's ideas by Christians can be taken as a personal affront though very often this is unintended. Turning this around the rejection of a vision of human dignity and the promoting of actions that affront this is also arrogant.

Three questions for reflection:

If Christianity is true does that mean Christians are always right?

Does speaking up for Jesus mean speaking against mercy-killing?

Why are Christians seen as "Thou shalt not" when it comes to sex?

3. Is Christianity made up?



Jesus coming back to life! Where's the evidence?...Christianity it's just made up!... Jesus lived ages ago so how could he matter today?... Christianity's out of touch and out of date... it's opposed progress throughout history... Christians keep to turning the clock back not forward!

If Christianity is based on facts how sure are they? New Testament translator and Jesuit priest Nicholas King engages with historical objections to Christianity including those raised in Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code. The so-called Gnostic gospels quoted by Brown are to be distinguished from the well attested and less fanciful New Testament documents.

Christian faith stands or falls on the truth of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15v3-4). The different accounts of the resurrection in the New Testament far from conflicting with one another actually have a ring of truth about them. The change in the disciples of Jesus and that of the Christian holy day from Friday to Sunday all point to the resurrection as historical fact. Outside the New Testament non-Christian historians of the time like Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius give evidence of the impact of Jesus and his alleged resurrection upon the people of their day.

To believe Christ died and rose is to believe that despite appearances there is hope for humanity. God has come and invested himself in us. Even if some see Christianity as the 'enemy of progress' the church's healing ministry and her contribution to education and human welfare tell another story. The church can appear backward-looking and can fail at times to be creative. For all of that it claims to possess the most forward-looking and positive vision in the world.

Three questions for reflection:

Does Christianity have a sound basis in history?

Can we speak up for Jesus unless we know he is alive?

Why do Christians sometimes challenge what others see as progress?

4. Is Christianity full of contradictions?



Christians say God is good! So what about the suffering He allows?...If Jesus died to take away sin, why is there so much evil in the world?...With so many different faiths and philosophies around, how can you believe Christianity is the only true one?...If Jesus is 'the way, the truth and the life' does that mean other religions have got it wrong?

How can you believe in a good God when there's so much evil in the world? How can the truth of Christianity be squared with the existence of billions of adherents of other religions? In this session broadcaster Steve Chalke of Oasis Trust looks at two big intellectual objections to Christianity.

When Jesus asks people to pray for God's will to be done on earth he implies it is not being done. His Cross addresses the problem of evil. It also shows us a God who expects nothing of us that he is not prepared to go through himself. The resurrection of Jesus is central to his uniqueness as the one who can help people rise above evil. It defies the chaos of death and dissolution just as the emergence of a rainbow defies the random chaos of the weather system.

Christians believe that all men and women bear something of God's image so something of God's truth will be reflected in other religions. The bible says Jesus illuminates all people and brings them the fullness of grace and truth (John 1:1-18). The existence of other religions proves at least that Christians have failed to live for Jesus in a way that commends him to the rest of the world.

Three questions for reflection:

With so much evil in the world how do you speak up for Jesus?

How can one man living in one place and time be the Saviour of the world?

If Christianity is true how do you explain the other religions in the world?

5. Is Christianity emotionally manipulative?



I thought Christianity was good news! So why is so much of it bad?...It's all about control — they make people feel guilty so that they can control them!...Christianity is just for desperate people! It's a crutch for the weak! I think Christianity is just for sad people who haven't got a life of their own!

Michelle Moran of the Sion Community leads a discussion about psychological objections to Christianity. Although some forms of evangelism can come across as emotional abuse, is guilt such a problem for people in a society with so little sense of right and wrong? If Christianity affects people's emotions it is more because Jesus Christ comes to bring life and bring it to the full (John 10:10).

Whereas people say Christianity 'does people down' many find through the church nothing less than acceptance and love. Jesus is experienced as one who gives people what they need before awarding them with what they deserve. When people feel guilty it is because their failings have shown. Because of God's love Christians have confidence to confess their inadequacy believing that God is a God of grace who forgives our sins.

Is Christianity a crutch? Christian faith does support human inadequacy but it is also a means of consecrating people's strengths. As C.S. Lewis wrote, it is not about 'helping a horse to jump but about giving it wings'. The turn around Christianity provides is less of an emotional trip and more of a transformation of life shown forth in outgoing love towards God and the world. This transformation

Three questions for reflection:

Is speaking up for Jesus about making people feel guilty?

Does Christianity exploit people's emotions?

Do people who are strong need Jesus?

6. Is Christianity true to Jesus?



I can't believe Jesus would approve of all the churches' pomp and ceremony!... can believe in Jesus but not in the church!...Christianity was founded by a carpenter so who made it so complex!...The Christians I know say one thing and do another... Didn't someone say Christianity hasn't failed - it's just never been tried!

Is it possible to have Jesus without the church? In the last discussion Lindsay Urwin, the Bishop of Horsham looks at perceptions of the church as a major obstacle to Christian belief. Even if the church admittedly falls short of Jesus and gets in his way at times it is still a fact that Jesus founded the church and promised to be with her through his gifts of the word of God and the sacraments.

To say 'Jesus was a simple carpenter', as if the church had over complicated things, risks reducing the mystery at the heart of faith in the divinity of Jesus. (Colossians 1:15) Dogma has its place in warding people away from such distortions of Christianity. The high standards of the church's ethical teaching also go back to Jesus. They can be defeating but are actually meant as a challenge. If Jesus requires a lot he is also prepared to give a lot to help disciples progress to perfection through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Even if there is sinfulness in the church there is also holiness which is the most powerful influence in the world. Where Christians succeed in making Jesus their be-all and end-all a community is created that really does intrigue and excite people.

Three questions for reflection:

How much does speaking up for Jesus mean speaking up for the church?

Can you be a Christian without church membership?

How do you live a life that speaks up for Jesus?

The voice of reason!

Christianity has always provoked controversy. Today it is perceived in some quarters as blind faith. Speaking up for Jesus attempts to raise the voice of reason in the face of such objections.

In this audio resource six prominent Christian thinkers engage with moral, historical, intellectual and psychological objections to Christian believing.



Produced for Christian Evidence Society by Cindy Kent (Premier Christian Radio) and John Twisleton (Chichester Diocese)

Speaking up for Jesus

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