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Sermon author: Dennis Mullen - Morrison Hill Christian Church P. O. Box 59 Kingston, TN 37763 USA 865.376.5205 [dennis@morrisonhill.com](mailto:dennis@morrisonhill.com) [www.morrisonhill.com](http://www.morrisonhill.com) [www.waitingforsunday.com](http://www.waitingforsunday.com)

Based on Timothy Keller's [The Reason for God](#)

### **The reason for God 4 – Christianity's record of injustice – SN 1.31.10**

Let's begin with self-critique, a test of our understanding of ourselves and how others think of us. What ARE some of those injustices?

Inquisition. Slavery. Crusades. Salem witch trials. ???

Expand beyond Christianity to religion in general. Christopher Hitchens cleverly identifies these places as centers of religious-inspired violence: "Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad." [Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*]

We could say: "We didn't do it" (lie); "Not our fault" (excuse); "We're not the only ones" (childish). Or we could plead guilty as charged.

Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people, used by the powerful to enslave them and take their money and land. Do you know who else said that? Isaiah. Jeremiah. Amos. Jesus. So there is much to be said for acknowledging the guilt of our religion and some of those who most strongly claim it.

#### **Three issues:**

1. Christians and their glaring character flaws. If this stuff is true, why aren't we better than we are?
2. War and violence. Why have Christians caused and supported so much injustice, evil and pain?
3. Fanatics. Even if I like Christ, I can't stand Christians. They're self-righteous, hypocritical, smug.

#### **1. Christians and their glaring character flaws**

Let's face it, says Keller. Much of what we regard as good character is simply good upbringing. If kids are loved, disciplined and challenged, they most often grow up to be decent, kind and mostly honest (Christian or not). And if a kid had lots of problems growing up, then even after accepting Christ, his life may have LOTS of room for improvement, even by the standards of decent society.

**James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.** Jesus says that God causes his sun to shine on the righteous and unrighteous. **Genesis** says that God made us in His own image. These teach us that there is "common grace" that is the result of humans being created in God's image. People need Jesus, but they don't need him in order to do many good things.

Two observations from Keller: 1) In order to begin to measure someone's growth in Christ, you have to know not just where they are today but how far they have come. 2) The church isn't a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners, right? There are always more sick people at the hospital than at the museum.

## 2. War and violence

Actually I'm going to offer the excuse that I said earlier was childish. We're not the only ones. Is the history of Christianity stained with war? The history of the human race is stained with war, and Christians are members of the human race. Are churches places of conflict? Any place people work together become places of conflict (not ONLY conflict) and the ones who work together in churches happen to be people. The Communists try to stamp out God, and something else takes his place. The French Revolution glorified human reason but it was one of the most bloody and least just periods in history. Money is a more powerful motivator to war than religion and many suspect it is really the root cause of every war. ("the root of all kinds of evil").

Keller says that we must conclude that there is a violent and selfish impulse deep within us that finds expression in societies of all kinds, and the fact of violence and injustice isn't necessarily a refutation on the prevailing beliefs. (I think many would argue with him about that last part).

## 3. Fanatics.

Keller means people who are so devoted to church that they are smug, condescending, legalistic. Once again, we could fall back on "we're not the only ones". Vegetarians, people who drive hybrids, prominent atheists like Hitchens can be smug and disdainful. But we have our share, and we know it is inconsistent with our faith.

Keller says that if you consider Christianity to be primarily a self-improvement program, than the more you improve the more you disapprove...of others. Smugness and pride enter.

But if it's a message of being saved by grace through faith apart from works, that is profoundly humbling. Mean, proud people are that way not because they're too Christian but because they're not Christian enough.

Again, that disdainful quote I started with last week: *From Fake Steve Jobs...I do not believe in your crazy made-up Western "God." I believe that what you are teaching people is at best a fairy tale and at worst an extremely dangerous and negative set of beliefs that have generally made the world a worse place and are too often used as a way to rob people. It sickens me to think of the way "Christians" have perverted the teachings of Jesus.*

It's Christians, not Jesus who draw his ire and he doesn't see similarity. He's partly right.

Now, come back to this: Among the loudest and harshest critics of religion was Jesus Himself, which means that we don't have to defend or explain everything done in the name of Jesus. Indeed, we find many areas of agreement with non-Christians here.

**Jesus at the Temple – Matthew 21 - <sup>12</sup>Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of**

those selling doves. <sup>13</sup>"It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer, 'but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

**Luke 20 - <sup>46</sup>"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. <sup>47</sup>They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."**

**Isaiah 58:1-8** – Loose the chains of injustice, share your food...

Notice that it is in the Scriptures themselves that we find the language and reason to critique the faults and sins of the church.

Slavery is often cited as an example of the church's pattern of evil. Slavery has been part of human history almost from the beginning. The OT Law regulated it for the Hebrews and taught fairness and compassion. The NT addressed slaves with dignity, telling them that in Christ they could choose love over hatred and bitterness and serve an eternal purpose.

Slavery as practiced in America and elsewhere was a great evil. But who says? Is that a conclusion that you reach by saying that there is no absolute truth, that people should choose right and wrong for themselves? Actually, the Bible tells me so. Not just the OT prophets but **1 Timothy 1:8-11 - <sup>8</sup>We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup>We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine <sup>11</sup>that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.**

More broadly, to say something is evil, even to say that the church has taken part in evil is to borrow language from God. Without God, there isn't anything that is evil, just unpleasant or inconvenient.

Slavery. It had history behind it. Our economy depended on it, here in the South but before that in England. People said it was too big to fail. So what finally brought it down? Concentrated and sacrificial effort by Christians who knew the language of good and evil.

Civil Rights in America – MLK motivated the nation against it. Did he do so by appealing to secularism and by saying that there is no real truth, just what we make for ourselves? Actually, one of his most famous quotes is from **Amos 5:22-24**

<sup>22</sup> **Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.**

**Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.**

<sup>23</sup> **Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.**

<sup>24</sup> **But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!**

*"When people have done injustice in the name of Christ they are not being true to the spirit of the one who himself died as a victim of injustice and who called for the forgiveness of his enemies."*  
[Timothy Keller, The Reason for God]

Next up: God, love and hell – Can there be a loving God AND hell?  
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