The Problem with Christianity **[1]**

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The (great) thing about having your own blog is that you can make sweeping and far reaching statements without having to give much (or any) backing for it. It keeps the culture of trolling alive and healthy. In this spirit I want to give my concise reason for what the problem of the Christian faith is.

It seems to me that many objections of atheists in the western world to Christianity originally sprung from an emotional source: some people said things to them which they did not appreciate (and, indeed, were not kind), or forced them to behave in a way they did not want to, or the like1. "The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today," said Brennan Manning, "is Christians." This is tragic statement, but I think it is true. While Manning went on to speak of Christians who "acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle", I think equal weight can be put behind the words which Christians speak: not necessarily because they intend to belittle or ridicule (although some certainly do) people who are "in the wrong", but because they do not know how to approach the person or what their circumstances and reasons are. Rather than speaking a kind word, a harsh word is spoken. There are of course a plethora or variants to this theme, but I think you get the idea of the types of Christian-non-Christian interactions about which I am speaking.

In light of this, I offer the following explanation of why this happens:

Christians are sinners.

It may sound paradoxical, but if you go to any Bible teaching church, you will find people who affirm this statement. While Jesus came to die for our sins so that we can be forgiven, we *remain* sinners while we are on earth. Paul wrote:

> For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good.
>
> Romans 7:18

This says that while Paul *intended* to always do good, it often found himself stumbling and sinning. Every Christian can attest to this statement regarding themselves.

There is something which Christians call *sanctification*. It is the *process* of letting go of one's sinful life, growing in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23), and becoming more like Jesus. But while

on this earth, a person will never become exactly like Jesus in the sense that they no longer sin at all. Unlike, say, Buddhism or Hinduism, Christians have no allusions that they will reach a type of "Nirvana" while still on earth. But perhaps their words are kinder, and their actions less blameworthy. There are no milestones or merit badges for sanctification: it happens at a different pace for every person.

What sets Christianity apart from any other religion (at least of which I am aware of), is that one is saved by faith alone (*sola fide*). When one comes to faith in Christ, you are *justified* and *saved*. This means that the requirement for coming to God is wholly fulfilled. Sanctification serves as an indication of justification: both for others and yourself. Because human beings do not truly know the hearts of other human beings and whether they are genuinely justified or not, we can gauge whether someone is justified by the sanctification which takes place in their life.

In other religions, one attains salvation by works. Setting jihadists aside (for the sake of simplifying the discussion), a Muslim attains salvation through being a good Muslim. This involves deeds: caring for the poor and the oppressed, saying prays, living a good and wholesome life, *et cetera*. And, yes, many Muslims are really remarkable human beings. In such religions, the single most important thing is to become a good person. In Christianity, the single most important thing is to realise that you are not a good person, nor can you ever be a person who meets the perfect standard set by God. Only once you have come to realise this and you have repented of your sins and turned to Jesus can you be saved. This makes Christianity distasteful for many people because, at its core, it focusses on your badness, not your goodness.

Meeting a Christian for the first time, I do not know whether they have this same understanding of their faith as the one which I just described. Perhaps they do, or some variant, or they have all the individual pieces, but not the whole picture. I cannot make a judgement about their standing with God, but it could be that they are at a point where they do not speak the kind words which they perhaps should. That is their sin, but there is forgiveness for that, just as for their other, mine, and your sins.

Unfortunately, given the dichotomies between the Christian and secular worlds, non-Christians are less likely to be forgiving for the wrongs done against them, especially if there is no repentance.

I want to end off by clearing up one more thing: what I am *not* saying is that Christians are sinners and can therefore go forth and act however they want. A Christian always has to keep sanctification in mind and strive to be more like Jesus. And not the Jesus they want Him to be, but the real Jesus: the one who spoke difficult things which even Christians sometimes wish He had not said2. I am also not saying that atheists and the secular world should not hold Christians accountable to the wrongs which they have done or said on the basis that they are just poor, helpless sinners (growing in and owing up to accountability and responsibility is part of sanctification). What I am saying is that atheists and the secular world should stop criticising Christians for not being perfect. The Christian faith is not about becoming perfect3. If you want perfection, then please, please *do not* look to Christians. Look to Christ.

- 1. Here I am speaking of things which Christians mights have said which are truly mean, and *not* just things that the atheist does not *want* to hear.
- 2. See, for example, Ten Things I Wish Jesus Never Said [2] by Victor Kuligin and Hard Sayings of Jesus [3] by F. F. Bruce.
- 3. If you meet a Christian who does believes this, then tell them I said that it is not so and point them to this article.

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