

“The Church of History Has Done Terrible Things!”

Bible Study

10:05am • November 29, 2020



I Need An Answer

“Hasn’t the Christian church done some terrible things in history?”

REV. PAUSTIAN'S INTRODUCTORY DEVOTION

Drops of blood dotted the forehead of Christ that night.

He had been praying.

Suddenly he stood up and strode to the entrance of the Garden of Gethsemane, a move John will later describe in one of the most chilling sentences in the Bible: “Jesus, knowing everything that was coming upon him. . . . “Knowing everything --knowing “to the very last detail.” Soldiers arrived to arrest him, as if on cue, hundreds of heavily armed men, as if they expected a fight, carrying torches, as if they expected to be searching the bushes. He was not what they expected.

“Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I AM.”

With that several hundred men, Judas among them, fell backward to the ground before Majesty and the sound of God speaking his own name. Jesus stood there bathed in the light of a full moon, the expression on his face unchanged.

“Who is it you want?”

Soldiers and guards struggled to their feet, trying to regain their dignity, but their minds were spinning! What had just happened? The captain could only say again, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Again he answered, “I AM. . .and you will let these men go.”

It was not a request, not a bargain. It was a direct command.

Peter, however, didn't want to be “let go,” not after all his boasting. He drew a short sword from the folds of his garment. “Shall I fight for you?” he cried, not waiting for an answer. Instead he slashed at the servant Malchus, severing a small piece of his ear. It was a show of love by Peter but a poor one, one that ignored everything Jesus stood for.

Hundreds of swords must have flashed at that moment. Jesus moved quickly to save Peter's life, not wanting him to die by the very weapon he had drawn.

“Put your sword away!”

Jesus knelt down beside the whimpering Malchus; blood seeped out between his enemy's fingers. And in a scene of dark chaos, violence, and maddening injustice, this divine act of human kindness.

Jesus healed him.. (Rev. Mark Paustian, *Prepared to Answer*, pp.136-137) -read John 18:1-11

Getting Started

What terrible things have taken at the hands of the Christian church?

How do things like “Manifest Destiny” and “The Christian Right-Wing Agenda” appear to those outside the faith?

An Important Distinction

List some of the institutions which carry the name “Christian.”

Why is it necessary to distinguish between the visible church and invisible Church? Who belongs to these different groups?

Culpable and capable of such evil?

Agree / Disagree “Those who do hold to the true Christian faith can never be tragically misguided in their actions.”

What happens when the visible Christian church takes up arms and seeks worldly power?

What error lies in the accusation, “She can’t be a Christian. Christian’s never do that.” Why is this error so deadly?

Discuss: If Christians do not rely on the power of the government, politics, or the sword, for security and the spread of God’s kingdom then what is left?

*“Even true Christians can be tempted to surrender in miserable weakness to the very worst inclinations of fallen human nature.”
- Paustian*

Describe the outcome of Christians who carry out horrible acts against others.

“Put your sword away!”

(Some) simplistically assume that all religion is cut from one cloth, even though the founder of Islam died saying, “Death to all Christians. Death to all Jews,” and the object of my faith died saying, “Father, forgive them.” I take no pleasure in pointing this out, believe me. –Paustian, Prepared to Answer p. 138

How does the command of Christ for his church stand opposed to the scientist and philosopher who teach a morality based on “reason”, “natural selection,” and “survival of the fittest”?

Read the following

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor ^z and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Luke 6:27-28

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

How should every credible spokesperson of Christianity respond when someone carries out an act of violence in the name of Christ?

Discuss the heart of the Christian faith using the following from Scripture:

Is 53:7–11.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush *him* and cause *him* to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

The Reality of Us All

Explain: The horrible sins of many in the Christian church bring out a truth which most atheist *are unwilling to admit*: all the human race is totally corrupted and sinful.

"It is easily demonstrated that evil done in the name of Christ is, in truth, the ultimate abandonment of Christ. However, if someone who says that there is no God and, therefore, no ultimate morality, should commit the same acts of evil, it is not a betrayal of his or her philosophy but its ultimate expression. Do you see the difference?" -Paustin p.141

The Hope of Us All

When discussing the sins of the Christian church, its crimes, failings, you need not point your finger at the rest of the world as worse or more damaging. What could be more disheartening than a Christian sinning against another being created in the image of God, a soul and body bought with Christ's blood? How could the world not cry foul at such a sight? Not much could be more heartless or damaging.

The real answer to such evil is revealed in someone else. There's a better place to point. A violent religious zealot, named Paul, discovered that long ago. ⁻¹⁶

1 Timothy 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.

Romans 5:6-8

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 2:1-2

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

With this hope in the heart, what *beautiful things* have been done through the body of Christ?

? How would you answer the charge: “The Christian church of history has done some terrible things. How can you follow its teachings?”

Read the closing devotional thought by Mark Paustin:

You have car trouble and are stranded in a crime infested neighborhood. It's night. Six bulky men stream out of a house and make their way toward you. Now, be honest, would it make any difference to you at all to know that the house they just left is where they hold their weekly Bible study?

Saying yes is your admission that the influence of Christ, by his Word is a good one after all. His Spirit is one that tugs toward love and self-forgetting. His is an impulse to gladly serve, to gladly die, and to let the world discover that the safest place on earth is among the twos and threes that gather in his name.

For there he is.