

A Rational Defense For The Christian Faith

By Ted Broadway

November 1999

The Obstacle Of Hypocrites In The Church

Almost every Christian knows or has met a person who has rejected Christianity because "there are too many hypocrites in the church". Because of the moral failures of church people they have known or because of "religious" wars and witch trials- they have rejected Christianity. People express this kind of objection in many ways but the main point is that the hypocrisy of Christians invalidates Christianity. How do we answer these people? This month let's look at question of the hypocrisy of individual Christians invalidating the truth of the Christian faith.

First, choosing to reject Christianity because "there are too many hypocrites in the church" is to commit a fallacy known as the "trivial objection". This happens when an arguer raises minor criticisms of a position and then in error think that these minor objections have undermined the position. The central issue is whether or not the claims of Christianity are true or not- did Jesus rise from the dead? is the Bible the Word of God? did God make the universe and us for His pleasure? is Jesus the Messiah? Whether or not Christians are successful in living up to biblical ethics is not the issue and has little bearing on whether the central claims of Christianity are true or not. Suppose Albert Einstein discovered the $E=MC^2$ because he was a Nazi who wanted to invent an atomic bomb that would win the world for Hitler. Einstein's bad motives or behavior would not mean that E does not equal MC^2 . The objections do not rise to the position of being able to undermine the position.

And second, people often have grave misconceptions about the nature of our faith (many church goers do too...). Many people see Christianity as a system of ethics- a list of rules by which we live our lives and make us better people. Christianity is about Jesus Christ- Immanuel- God-With-Us and what He has done for us. Namely, He has

A Rational Defense For The Christian Faith

By Ted Broadway

saved us from sin and death by His merit, not ours. It is about what He has done for us. It is not about how strong our faith is but His love for us even in our weak faith. We exacerbate the misunderstanding when we give the impression that to be a Christian means to be a perfect follower of a list of rules. That is not what Christians are claiming.

We Christians spend a lifetime struggling. The Scriptures describe sin as a force, a disease, if you will, that is shot through all of humanity- a deadly, fatal, debilitating force. The Scriptures describe conversion as the beginning, not the perfection, of the long process of change and transformation. We are redeemed right now but we are not yet perfected.

There are two kinds of hypocrisy. The first is what I call "hypocrisy proper", that is- where you pretend to believe something you really don't believe (the word hypocrite comes from the Greek word **hypocrites** which means "actor"). There are some of those in the church. The other kind of hypocrisy is the kind that comes from immaturity and imperfection. Because salvation/ transformation/ sanctification is a process- this kind of hypocrisy should be expected. In this sense every Christian is a hypocrite until we all meet in Glory. In gentleness and respect, we Christians would do well to live as obediently as we can, repenting and not hiding from the error of our ways, full of thanksgiving to God for saving us. We can admit to both God and our neighbors when we have been hypocritical and then lean on God's grace and transforming power- not pointing toward our righteousness but His.