

Companion notes  
for the video program

# Stumbling Blocks to Faith

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This five-part series explores five major subjects that discourage belief in the Christian faith for many people. They are key obstacles to faith that those witnessing to belief in Christ must be aware of and, with God's help, strive to overcome. They are:

- **Hypocrisy**
- **Other Religions**
- **Science and Faith**
- **Suffering**
- **Sacrifices**

## PART I: HYPOCRISY

Webster's Dictionary defines a hypocrite as one who affects virtues or qualities he does not have, and hypocrisy as a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not, especially the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.

Part I of this video explores the problem of the failures of Christians as a stumbling block to the acceptance of Christianity.

Unfortunately, hypocrisy has always been the unwelcome shadow of religious life. Too often, human weakness in Christians is perceived by non-Christians as hypocrisy. It is one of the favorite excuses of those who are attracted to Christ, but who hesitate to make that final ego-shattering, world—discarding total commitment to Jesus. Non-Christians often expect everyone who professes the Lord to be a saint. They forget that Christ came to save human beings who carry their humanity to the grave, who stumble and occasionally make fools of themselves, but who pick themselves up and take up their crosses to follow Him whom they love. Yes, Christians can be sometimes stupid, boorish, arrogant, and miserable because they are human. And it is precisely this humanity that God so loved and sent His only Son to save.

### References

*Thou shalt hate all hypocrisy; and whatsoever is pleasing to the Lord, that shalt thou do.* Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (possibly 2nd-3rd cent.) Book VII, XIV, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII.

*But it is certain that nothing feigned or false can bear the form of true virtue; nay, it cannot even last. At first it flourishes, then, as time goes on, like a flower it fades and passes away, but what is true and sincere has a deep root.* St. Ambrose (c. 339-397), *Duties of the Clergy*, Book II, Chapter XXII, 112, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

*For those who do bad things in secret and good things publicly are to be admonished to consider with what swiftness human judgments flee away, but with what immobility divine judgments endure.* Gregory the Great (c. 540-604). *Pastoral Rule*, Chapter XXXV, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

*It is no fault of Christianity if a hypocrite falls into sin.* St. Jerome (c. 342-420). Quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, Frank S. Mead, Ed., Revell.

### Questions for Discussion

1. If you were to observe hypocrisy in a relative, friend or co-worker, how would you act? Would you simply feel sad, or would you think carefully what you could say to address the matter?
2. Does the observed hypocrisy of the world “turn you off,” or does it give you pause to examine your own soul and to try to light your own candle in the dark?
3. To what extent is the excuse of “hypocrisy” itself hypocritical?
4. Did Jesus have much to say about hypocrisy? What was his outlook on the subject?
5. Was Jesus himself ever accused of hypocrisy?

## PART II: OTHER RELIGIONS

*But there is no other way than this, — to become acquainted with this Christ, to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaac for the remission of sins; and for the rest, to live sinless lives.* Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I.

Part II of this video explores problems that are especially relevant today: How are Christians to deal with the modern relativistic view that one religion is as good as another? How are they to explain to people of other religions who lead good lives that salvation is to be found only in Christ? C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* writes: “We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ . . . . But in the meantime, if you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself.”

Christianity is exclusive. Jesus made it so. He said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me.” Indeed Scripture asserts it is by faith in Christ alone that we are made free. Acts 4:12 reminds us: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

### References

*But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’* Revelation 1:17

*For in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Word.* Irenaeus (c.130-c.200), *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I.

*Just as no soul is without sin so neither is any soul without seeds of good. Therefore, when the soul embraces the faith, being renewed in its second birth by water and the power from above, then the veil of its former corruption being taken away, it beholds the light in all its brightness.* Tertullian (c. 160-c. 225), *A Treatise on the Soul*, Chap. XLI, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III.

### Questions for Discussion

1. You have a friend who is not a Christian, but who leads a good life and who is known to be kind and generous. How would you attract him/her to Christ?
2. When we say that Jesus is the Truth and the Way to God, are we saying that we who believe are superior to others who follow other ways?
3. Discuss how belief in the gospel of Christ should produce in the followers of Jesus gratitude and humility rather than smugness and judgementalism.
4. How should Christians in their witness be ready to begin with appreciation for elements in the other faiths before going on to show the distinctives of the Gospel? For example, see Paul's witness to the Athenians in Acts 17: 22-23.

### PART III: SCIENCE AND FAITH

*The cosmos and all it contains are the creation of God . . . this omnipresence of God, the Creator, in all activity, moral as well as physical, is to me the most profound truth that thought and human heart can apprehend.* Pamphlet published while in Johannesburg in the 1940's, quoted in Alan Houghton Broderick, *Father of Prehistory*, The Abbe Henri Breuil: His Life and Times, Morrow, 1963.

We carry into the twenty-first century the continuing conflict between Science and Faith. Part III of this video presents a number of views on this trying subject. Evolution is now taught as established fact instead of theory. Scientists balk at accepting the idea of any belief which cannot be demonstrated. And new breakthroughs in science create moral dilemmas never encountered before.

### References

*Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: . . . 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?'* Job 38:1, 4.

*All the wisdom of the world is childish foolishness in comparison with the acknowledgment of Christ.* Martin Luther (1483-1546), *Luther's Table Talk*, World Publishing Co., 1982.

*You cannot fancy a more skeptical world than that in which men doubt if there is a world.* G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), *Orthodoxy*, Fontana Books, 1963.

### Questions for Discussion

1. You are attending a secular school/college and bombarded with ideas: there are no absolutes, God is a projection of your ego, the first men were tiny monkey-like creatures, death is the end of life. Your own beliefs are criticized and you are very careful what you write in test papers. How could you and should you try to witness in this situation?
2. Some give the impression that committed Christians are afraid of the "truth" science presents. How can Christians prepare themselves to deal with such onslaughts against their faith?

3. Scientists often say that their conclusions are only valid until another comes along to disprove them and come up with another theory. How can we best explain that no one will come after Christ and that he has the answers to the most important questions?
4. How do we maintain our confidence in the foundations of our faith while at the same time remaining open to learn from God's revelation in the natural world as uncovered by science?
5. What can we learn from the mistakes of the past where the church took stands against scientific progress that it later had to retract?
6. Discuss how the Bible relates to science and the way it can affirm *what* God did but not necessarily *how* God did it.

#### **PART IV: SUFFERING**

*For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps . . . by His wounds you have been healed.* I Peter 2:21, 24b.

Why do good people suffer? Does God cause or permit natural disasters, the death of a child, the suffering of the terminally ill? Some thoughts on suffering are discussed in Part IV of this video. Evil is the consequence of sin, and we all share in the pain it causes.

#### **References:**

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* Romans 8:22-23.

*It is not a blessed thing to be in the midst of suffering; but it is blessed to be victorious over it, and not to be cowed by the power of temporal pain.* St. Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy*, Book II, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. X.

*A true Christian does not say: I had not thought of it, but is most certain that the beloved cross is near at hand; and thus is not afraid when it goes ill with him, and he is tormented.* Martin Luther (1483-1546), *Luther's Table Talk*, World Publishing Co., 1982.

#### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Everyone experiences suffering to some degree. How do you look upon suffering in your own life?
2. Polycarp (c. 69-c. 155), knowing he would be sentenced to death in the arena, was able to say: "Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, . . . that I may be found the pure bread of God." How were the martyrs able to face such terrible sufferings for Christ? What can we learn from them?
3. Have you ever heard of others speak of how good came forth from suffering in their lives?
4. Have you ever found suffering in your own life was later seen from a more positive perspective as valuable and treasured?
5. When others near us are suffering, what should we seek to give? Answers? Compassion? Companionship? Support? Discuss in terms of specific situations you know of.

## PART V: SACRIFICE

*Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. Matthew 19: 21, 22*

To give up the old to become new in Christ is extremely difficult for many who would like to become Christians but are afraid of the sacrifices. And what are the sacrifices? What things must we give up?

### References

*I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Romans 12:1.*

*Christians are not born but made. Jerome, Letter CVII, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VI.*

*When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he frees him from his natural bondage unto sin, and by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good. Westminster Confession of 1647, Chapter IX.*

*There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says in the end, 'Thy will be done.' C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), *The Great Divorce*, Macmillan P/B, 1963.*

### Questions for Discussion

1. The bonds of old habits are so strong for many people that they cannot break them to become Christians. How can we help them to see that the freedom of Christ is a greater joy than their habits?
2. No sacrifice was greater than Christ's. Can you think of ways we can help others to sacrifice their will for Christ?
3. You have, perhaps, on occasion, made sacrifices in your life. How do these sacrifices make us better able to see and praise the will of God?
4. When David Livingstone (1813-1873), the great missionary and explorer, was asked to comment on his sacrifices in Africa, he replied that "it was no sacrifice at all." His love of Christ made it possible for him to say that. Can we do the same?
5. Do the Scriptures ever call for sacrifice without at the same time suggesting that we will find far more in return?
6. Consider the Christian martyrs in history. The most that could have been taken from them was their lives. But even that did not deter them. Consider the memorable comment of Justin Martyr who wrote to the Roman emperor: "You can kill us but you cannot hurt us!" What did he mean?

**SPEAKERS**

**Leesa Kelly**, presenter.

**Art Lindsley, Ph.D.**, scholar-in-residence of C.S. Lewis Institute.

**Lon Solomon**, pastor in Virginia.

**Robert M. Norris**, senior pastor in Maryland.

**Michael Novak**, theologian and author.

**Jim Byrne**, associate pastor in Maryland.

**Hope Kim**, missionary in Croatia.

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