

There is some truth in this objection. The church does indeed have people who are less than Christ-like in their attitudes and behavior. And yet, this is exactly where such people *need* to be!

The church is not a museum of perfect people — it is a hospital for sinners. People with flaws are invited in, so it should be no surprise that problems are inside it. The church is exactly where sinners need to be, to hear the message of forgiveness, to hear the teachings of Jesus, to be exhorted to be more like Jesus.

True, there are hypocrites in the church. Some people like the social advantages of the church, but have not really submitted their lives to Jesus Christ.

But there are also people remarkably *changed* by Christ. Former prostitutes, former alcoholics, former white-collar criminals, and even former hypocrites give their testimony that Jesus is living in them. Because of this, some people believe that Christianity is true. This evidence convinces them.

## 5. The Return of Christ

This life, with all its pains and problems, is not all there is. There will come a time when injustices will be set right, when goodness will be rewarded.

The apostle Paul, preaching to philosophers in Athens, ended his sermon with this claim: "God commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

There will come a day of judgment, a day on which *everyone* will be called into account in front of Jesus, the Judge who died for us. How can we stand before him? Not through our own wisdom, strength or goodness. We can stand only through the mercy of Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation.

Christianity teaches the good news that eternal life is possible through faith in Christ. We can live forever with God in great joy and peace! There is tremendous purpose in our lives, purpose in our experiences, even in our pains and sorrows. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be, too, if we believe in him.

If this life is all there is, it has no real value. But if eternity is possible, it is worth everything in the world. In Christianity, there is everything to gain, and nothing to lose. Some people choose to believe.

## Conclusion

Christians believe for many different reasons. Do any of these reasons make sense to you? We'd love to talk about it. Jesus means a lot to us.

# WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

*Living and Sharing the Gospel*

## For further reading:

Michael Green. *Who Is This Jesus?* Nelson, 1994.  
C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity.* Touchstone, 1996.  
Paul Little. *Know Why You Believe.* InterVarsity Press, 1988.  
John Stott. *Basic Christianity.* InterVarsity Press, 1986.

## Why would anyone want to be a Christian?

In several nations, Christianity is a crime. But people become Christians anyway — despite penalties and even threats of death. Thousands of believers are killed each year, yet more people become Christians.

Christianity can spread even when it is persecuted. That is actually the way Christianity started — Jesus was killed as a political criminal. In the first 200 years after his death, many thousands of Christians were killed as the Roman Empire tried to exterminate this new faith.

Millions of people become Christians each year. Scientists, farmers, historians, and clerks — people from all walks of life — become Christians.

**Why?** This pamphlet gives several reasons. You can see whether any of them make sense to you.

## 1. The Teachings of Jesus

Christianity wouldn't make any sense without Jesus at its center. Jesus began his ministry as a teacher. He emphasized love, mercy, faith, forgiveness and honesty. He taught gentleness rather than violence, generosity rather than selfishness, doing good rather than evil.

Jesus had respect for all people, even people others looked down on. Jesus touched lepers, welcomed children, and treated women and foreigners with respect.

But Jesus said some harsh things about religious leaders. He hated hypocrisy and the attitude of looking down on others.

Jesus spent time with the "sinners" that the leaders despised. He was tolerant. He spent time with the tax collectors that many people hated. Prostitutes found forgiveness, not condemnation

And Jesus kept on teaching even when he knew the religious leaders were trying to kill him. He was sincere, and it cost him his life.

People worldwide respect Jesus for his teachings. Many have tried to apply these teachings in their own lives. They have become disciples — followers of Jesus.

But sometimes the people who like Jesus' teachings are surprised to learn what he really taught. He said that he had a unique relationship with God and that no one could get to God except through him. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). Some people accept this; others do not.

## 2. The Resurrection of Jesus

Roman soldiers crucified thousands of people. But only one of them has a following today. Why is that? Perhaps because only Jesus was resurrected.

The resurrection of Jesus was the main message of the early church, according to the book of Acts. This is what the early disciples testified about and preached about. "God has

raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact" (Acts 2:32).

With this simple message, Christianity grew rapidly. Paul said there were hundreds of people who had seen Jesus alive (1 Corinthians 15:6). Thousands were convinced as the early apostles risked their lives to tell what they believed.

No other explanation makes sense. If Jesus' body had remained in the tomb, the religious leaders would have used it to stop the message.

Nor would it make any sense for the disciples to steal the body, then risk their lives for the next 30 years preaching that he was alive, without any of them ever betraying the secret. Ordinary fishermen do not risk their lives to preach something they know to be false.

Nor does it make sense that the disciples had hallucinations. Dozens of people do not have identical dreams, all substantiated by an empty tomb. The disciples were not deceived, nor were they deceivers. They preached that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had now gone into heaven to be at the right hand of God.

On this testimony, preached by ordinary people with an extraordinary boldness, thousands more believed. Even by first-century standards, it was a strange story, but they accepted it. And if God had raised this man from the dead, then God must have approved of what he taught, even his claims to be the only route to salvation.

## 3. The Death of Jesus

If Jesus was such a good man, if God really approved his teachings, why did God allow him to die? What was the purpose of his hideous death?

Early Christians were not long in trying to explain the death of Jesus, and more people found reason to believe the story.

It started with Jesus himself, who taught that he "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus said he was giving his life for a reason. His death had a purpose — it was to serve other people, to pay a price to rescue them.

The disciples said that Jesus "died for our sins"

— he died so that our sins, the things we have done wrong, could be forgiven. First-century Jews and Greeks were used to thinking about religion in terms of sacrifices. Jesus was a sacrifice, a payment of some kind, dying on behalf of other people to rescue them.

Scholars debate the reasons *why* Jesus had to die so others could be forgiven. But the bottom line is that he did it. He willingly gave his life to save us. It shows his great love for us — "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

For some people, this makes tremendous sense. Evil is serious, and it cannot be waved aside as if it did not matter. It matters a great deal, and the death of Jesus shows that it does. A huge cost was involved in paying for the consequences of sin.. Jesus' death shows not only the seriousness of sin, but also the depth of God's love for us. Because of Jesus' death, people believe that God loves them.

## 4. The Disciples of Jesus

One reason that Christianity spread so quickly in the first century is the believers. They set an example of sincerity, faith, love and mercy. They were letting Christ live in them. They, like their Master, were willing to give their lives to serve others.

They changed their ways from selfishness to helpfulness, from violence to peace, from greed to generosity. It was an astonishing transformation, and their friends wondered why they no longer lived in debauchery, lust and drunkenness (1 Peter 4:3-4).

These Christians had a change of life that spoke well of Jesus Christ. Some people were convinced of the truth of Christianity simply by seeing the results in their lives (1 Pet. 3:1).

And yet, the example set by Christians today is a reason some people do not believe! The church is supposedly full of hypocrites...