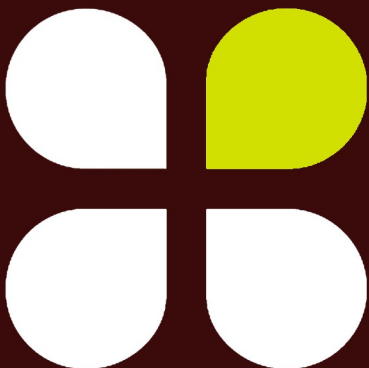


# COMMUNITY STUDY GUIDE

## UNCHRISTIAN

DAVID KINNAMAN & GABE LYONS



SCRIPTURE  
REASON  
EXPERIENCE  
TRADITION

# INTRO TO COMMUNITY STUDY GUIDES:

How do we know what we know? How do we come to find what is good and true? People have wrestled with these questions throughout human history. It's the study of *epistemology* and it's no small chore.

The people of God have wrestled with epistemology throughout Judeo-Christian history. How can we know that God is real, that He loves us, that He is working in the world today? These are huge questions, and many different Church leaders have attempted to answer them over the centuries, to explain how we as Christians can know what is true.

John Wesley, the eighteenth-century preacher and pioneer of Methodism, articulated epistemology in a way that still resonates with us today. In his ministry Wesley taught something that would later be named the *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*. We determine what is true using *Scripture, reason, experience and tradition*. By holding these "truth meters" in community and tension with one another, we are best able to hear and learn those things which God is communicating to us.

## FOLLOWING THE QUAD

We find that, nearly 300 years after Wesley brought it on the scene, the Quad is still helpful to Christians who want to learn what is true about humanity, God, the Church, and our present and future hope.

In *Scripture* we have the most tangible expression of God's revelation. For this reason, Scripture is the starting point of our Quad. Scripture provides us with the narrative of Israel and some of the earliest communities that followed Jesus and built his Kingdom. The Bible explains to us God's character and articulates what it looks like to become part of the people of God. As God's Spirit illumines it, we're able to use Scripture wisely today in our own context.

God has given us intelligence and welcomes us to use it. We naturally bring our cognitive ability and framework (our *reason*) into our handling and application of Scripture and our understanding of God. We want to worship God with our thoughtfulness, as we love Him enough to observe and meditate on His work in this world.

The Holy Spirit is available to Christ-followers as a Helper – consulting, convicting, encouraging, ministering, and illumining truth through all different kinds of mediums and situations. As individuals and as church communities we are called to remain sensitive to the Spirit's personal and particular guidance. Through a deep *experience* of God's Spirit we gain the wisdom and discernment needed to serve God in our culture and context today.

We're connected to the *tradition* of God's people throughout the centuries and around the globe. As we pursue truth, it's important that we look beyond our own context and learn from the wisdom of other faithful believers. By seeing how other Christians have understood truth, we're able to affirm and adopt many of their conclusions. We're also free to recognize and correct misleading thoughts of past Christians – moving forward into a healthier understanding of, and relationship with, God.

By holding the four components of the Quad together in dynamic community, we continuously learn and grow in our understanding of who we are, who God is, and what is going on in the world.

# SETTING THE STAGE

Sometimes pressing forward requires first going backward. We examine our past and present so the future can be brighter as we learn from our mistakes.

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons' book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Thinks About Christianity... and Why it Matters*, dissects contemporary Christianity and exposes some pretty ugly stuff. Through their research, Kinnaman and Lyons discover that, in the minds of people from 16 to 41 years of age, Christianity (as we know it) is a sinking ship. The Church has completely lost touch with the world. While they have nothing against Jesus, they say, people outside of Christianity harbor strong animosity toward today's Christians.

Kinnaman and Lyons (along with a wide-range of contributors including Dan Kimball, Brian McLaren, and Rick Warren) take us through a process of deconstructing the attitudes and practices of today's Christians, ourselves included. Each chapter of the book examines a different negative characteristic 16-to-41-year-olds have attributed to today's Christianity (hypocritical, sheltered, judgmental, etc.), and considers how that perception of Christianity is fair or unfair, and, more importantly, what we can do to change how we're relating with culture.

The authors take us on a journey that can be disheartening at times. Sometimes there are more criticisms or questions than clear prescriptive answers. And sometimes the authors and contributors prescribe solutions that seemingly fail to deal with the root problems of Christianity. (A lot of time is spent badgering the *demeanor* of Christians without challenging the *theology* that fueled their actions. This book lacks the theological and doctrinal scrutiny that would more fully address Christianity's inability to dialogue with postmodernity.) Nonetheless, *unChristian* is a book that can get us talking about the poor reputation Christianity has in larger culture.

Plenty of hot-button societal and political issues come up in this book. In approaching such topics, it's crucial that we walk with humility, strive for compassion, and continuously seek God for wisdom. May every conversation we have surrounding *unChristian* exhibit such discerning caution and sensitivity. May we be people who are following Christ well as he leads us into holiness and wholeness.

# CHAPTER ONE: THE BACKSTORY

## CHAPTER ONE QUESTIONS

[1] (Pg 15) Kinnaman quotes a person from Mississippi whom he encountered in his research: “Christianity has become bloated with blind followers who would rather repeat slogans than actually feel true compassion and care. Christianity has become streamlined into a juggernaut of fearmongering that has lost its own heart.”

This is more than an attitude problem. Our actions, when traced back far enough, are deeply rooted in that which we believe to be true – about ourselves, God, His Creation, human beings, Scripture, the future, etc. What are some specific areas in which warped beliefs have led to behavior on the part of Christians that is wildly different than that of Christ?

[2] (19) Kinnaman writes, “You have to keep the overwhelming size of American Christianity in mind because part of the reason that people agitate against the Christian faith is due to the real – and perceived – position of influence it has had. It is not a good time to be the favored team. It’s in vogue to be different, under the radar, and independent. Christianity feels like none of these things.”

What types of struggles do sincere Christians in America (where so many people say have a loose, not-so-life-changing affiliation with Christianity) have to deal with that Christians in, say, the Global South do not (though they certainly have their own challenges)?

[3] Do you think that increasing dissatisfaction with Christianity is due mostly to a change in the Church, the world, or both?

[4] (Pg 20) “Jesus is so much more than a logical proof,” Kinnaman says. John 14.16 quotes Jesus as calling himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. How has the American Church emphasized Jesus as Truth, but not as Way or Life? How would understanding Jesus as the Way and the Life alter not only our “public relations” with outside culture, but our speech and habits as Christians?

## CHAPTER TWO: DISCOVERING UNCHRISTIAN FAITH

### **MORE TO CONSIDER: COMMUNICATION SHIFTS ARE BIGGER THAN GENERATIONAL GAPS**

(Pgs 21-23) Kinnaman and Lyons rightly note that the demographic considered in their research (they refer to “Mosaics” and “Busters,” while others might refer to Generation X and Generation Y) are part of a shift that is beyond any type of generational fad from which they will grow up.

Mosaics and Busters represent the first children of the *postmodern shift*. While often discussed in terms of philosophical eras, it’s possible that postmodernity is better understood in terms of technology and the exchange of information. (In other words, the shift isn’t Descartes to Derrida so much as Gutenberg to Google.)

When the turn of the sixteenth century brought us the Print Age, the world felt a seismic shift. More information was available than ever before, leaving people with much more knowledge at their fingertips. With that information came increased skepticism toward the messages people had been fed prior to the shift. This was the case in greater culture and within the Church as well (the Protestant Reformation).

If the Print Age was a sucker punch in terms of new information being made available, the Electronic Age is a roundhouse kick to the teeth. Through non-stop television, a robust Internet, cell phones that can accomplish almost anything, and other electronic advanced, the world has changed in intense ways over the past thirty years.

We live in front of screens these days, constantly receiving information. Most of us spend a tremendous portion of our day taking in signals from multiple mediums (television, Internet, iPods, cell phones) simultaneously. We’re all over the place.

As a result, we know a little about a lot of things. Even more than we understand subject matter, we comprehend presentation and persuasion. We’re trained to know when someone’s offering us something of value and when we’re being sold garbage.

And it turns out there’s a lot of garbage out there.

The problem facing Christianity today is no more generational than are the Internet and television. (Do you really think they’re going to disappear anytime soon?) Postmodernity doesn’t need to be a “problem” for Christianity at all (even if the most theologically conservative Christians caricature it as the boogeyman). Postmodernity has the potential to help Christianity flourish. Just as the Print Age allowed Christians to see corruption within their theology and practice, so too does the Electronic Age serve as a catalyst for scrutiny and purification.

We need to be ready to be criticized. We need to be ready to make changes.

And we ought to be ready to be healthier than ever before.

## CHAPTER TWO QUESTIONS

[1] (22) Kinnaman explains that Mosaics and Busters want to live a “unique and personal journey” while dismissing marriage and family in favor of a social “tribe” of friendships. He notes that “under their relational connectedness lies fierce individualism.”

Why might a young person today engage in many friendships while avoiding covenant relationships (marriage and family)? In what ways might this be a response to the brokenness experienced within family structures in the latter half of the twentieth century? Without pushing or guiltting people into covenant relationships, how can a church community help someone to overcome fear or animosity toward committed relationships?

[2] (25) What do the terms “born-again” and “Evangelical” mean to you? How deeply do you associate yourself with those terms? Would your answer to this question have been strongly different at another point in your life?

[3] (26) “*We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than what we are for.*” What is Christianity *for*? What are you *for*?

[4] (28) If you examine the chart, “Outsiders’ Perceptions of Christianity,” you’ll find that in both positive and negative statements, those surveyed were far more likely to attribute a statement to “a lot or some [Christians]” than to “a lot [of Christians].” There’s an extent to which a few bad apples spoil the bunch. A fragment of Christians are giving our faith a bad name (not that the rest of us have things perfect, but this is what the numbers show).

The problem is that the Christians with the craziest views are often the ones with the loudest voices – the people making the news with their latest controversial sound-byte.

Supposing we are not the sort of Christians on that extreme fringe (the “some” indicated in the chart), how should we respond to Christians who are like that? Is it appropriate to become louder with a healthier message – hitting the air-waves with legit Christianity, if you will – or are we to be quiet and subversive?

How have you dealt with particularly divisive Christians in the past?

**BALANCING POINT: DON'T RE-PACKAGE GARBAGE THEOLOGY**

(Pgs 32-33) The authors go into an argument here concerning what they deem “hijacking Jesus.” They contend that people are watering down the message of Jesus to make him more likable and his teaching more easy to adopt.

While it's true that explaining Jesus as someone who never offends would be misleading, we need to understand that the status-quo presentation of Jesus in American churches is equally distasteful as many Christian leaders make Jesus more offensive than he really was/is – or at least they make him *their type of offensive*.

Explaining Jesus as non-offensive is bad news. So is intentionally making him support *your* offensive worldview. Portraying Jesus as some sort of jacked-up, womanizing, cage-fighting, dude-bro doesn't help anyone to learn the truth about Jesus. Christians in America have made Jesus offensive in all the wrong places.

This is one of many reasons why, when we talk about what's broken in Christianity, we move beyond the packaging of church (the type of songs we sing, the type of space we use for our gatherings) into the larger problems that lie within the packaging.

The problem isn't simply our methods of presenting God, it's our message as well. We've said a lot of things about God that simply aren't true. Many Christians in America propagate doctrines that are set in Hellenistic philosophy and not Jesus or his earliest followers. We're rooted in classical philosophers like Augustine more than in Jesus when it comes to how we understand human nature, God's sovereignty, the role and shape of salvation, and the afterlife.

So if the way we understand and talk about God is changing, well – good! If we can recover an understanding of God that is better rooted in the holistic and hopeful Kingdom teaching of Christ, that will go a long way to aid the Church in its healing process.

[5] (35) According to Kinnaman, “one-third [of young born-again Christians] admit that the way Christians act and the things they say make them embarrassed to be a Christian.” How, if at all, have other Christians made you uncomfortable to be associated with them?

[6] (Pg 36) Kinnaman partially attributes Christianity's bad rap to “faith perspectives [that] grate against a morally relativistic culture.” But isn't this contradicting an earlier point in the book (pg 26) which said, “*We have become famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for*”? Can't the Church maintain standards such as sexual purity while also being *for* the poor and marginalized, *for* creation care, *for* creativity and good art, *for* bringing about wholeness in the here-and-now? Does it have to be one or the other?

[6b] What often happens in the social issues within American politics is that Christians are considered *anti-gay* or *anti-abortion* rather than *for* the sanctity of marriage and *for* protecting the lives of the most helpless and needy in our world (the unborn). Maybe there's something to be said for how people opposed to Christianity frame the conversation. But are there things we can do in the way we articulate tense issues to explain that we are *for* some things that are very dear to us?

[6c] Do you think this perception of Christianity somehow reflects an underlying assumption on *our* part that God's passion is stronger *against* certain things than it is *for* others? Does our verbiage indicate a false view of God on our part – seeing His foremost attributes as wrath and anger rather than love, and assuming that wrath and not love undergirds His attribute of justice?

[7] (Pg 40) “Young outsiders and Christians alike do not want a cheap, ordinary, or insignificant life, but their vision of present-day Christianity is just that – superficial, antagonistic, depressing. The Christian life looks so simplified and constricted that a new generation no longer recognize it as a sophisticated, livable response to a complex world... Mosaics and Bust-ers deserve better than the unChristian faith, and they won't put up with anything less... If we do not deal with unChristian faith, we will have missed our chance to bring a deep spiritual awakening to a new generation.”

What has gone wrong that Christianity has become superficial and depressing? Can you look back on your Christian experience and see instances or examples of Christianity taking a turn for the worse?

[8] What new thing do you believe God is desiring to do in your generation? In what ways do you see yourself (and your faith community) having a role in that movement?

# CHAPTER THREE: HYPOCRITICAL

## CHAPTER THREE QUESTIONS

[1] (Pg 42) Forty-seven percent of young churchgoers find Christianity to be hypocritical. Where do you stand on this? Is Christianity more or less hypocritical than other people groups and religions? What do you believe is the larger problem: that Christians have failed to keep their own standards, or that they never meant to keep the standards in the first place?

[2] (43) Many of the examples quoted in the book are from people who used to participate in church communities. How can trust be built up with someone who has been wounded by hypocrisy in the Church?

[3] (44) “We are not known for the depth of our transparency, for digging in and solving deep-seated problems, but for trying to project an unChristian picture of having it all together.” Have you heard things taught by Christians (maybe in books or sermons) that lead to the assumption that life is supposed to be easy, or that every problem is black-and-white and easy to solve? Why might this drive outsiders (and even some Christians) crazy?

[4] (47) Kinnaman and Lyons’ research indicated that “born-again believers were just as likely [as non-Christians] to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that did not belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal nonprescription drug, to have said something that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person’s back.”

Wow, that’s rough. Of those behaviors listed above, which is most surprising to you?

Where are churches going wrong? How can a church community address these behaviors so that people can be freed from the brokenness caused by these things?

Explain the difference between addressing these things in a sin-centered way (just trying to get the elephant out of the room) and handling them in a God's-design-centered way (choosing God's holiness and wholeness over brokenness and disintegration).

[5] Does the problem with how we approach sin come back to the against/for issue of Chapter Two, that Christianity has become about what *not* to do and which people to condemn? Is it a problem that churches are filled with “fire and brimstone” messages which damn sinful actions, but there’s no visible alternative for what *to* do, what to be *for* (i.e. healthy sexuality, integrity in finances, care of creation and our physical bodies, etc.)? Do people understand what they’re missing out on when they settle for less than Jesus’ Way?

#### MORE TO CONSIDER: WHEN SAINTS SIN

This issue of always being against things (while rarely being visibly and obviously *for* something) might be rooted in poor *eschatology* (the study of end times) within much of American Christianity. It is not rare to hear a Christian pastor or teacher downplay the effectiveness of Christ’s death and resurrection and his role as Second Adam (breaking the curse, or at least making such a break *available to all humanity*).

No Christian would come right out and say, “You know, I’m not sure that Jesus really *works*.” What you might hear instead are Christians, referring to a Christian’s sin, saying “Well, he’s only human.” *Only human?* That’s a phrase that shouldn’t make sense to Christians.

Jesus won and darkness lost. The blood of Jesus is even more effective in power and scope to impact humanity (and all of creation) than was the first sin of Adam. By accepting Jesus as Messiah and walking in his Way, we’re led into a wholeness that is stronger than any brokenness we’ve ever known. Yes, it’s an on-going process, and we still feel the sting of brokenness around us, but that speaks to salvation as an ongoing process; it’s not a knock on the effectiveness of Christ’s work.

When we sin, it’s not because sin is our identity; it’s because we’re denying our identity as Christians.

Rob Bell says it well: “In the New Testament [“sinners”] is not how people are identified. They’re identified as saints, as holy ones and as the bride of Christ. The whole premise of trusting Christ in the Scriptures is that you have a new identity. If you insist on calling yourself a sinner, you have to do it beyond the Bible.

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**MORE TO CONSIDER: CONTINUED**

...According to the Scriptures, you now are somebody new, you aren't who you were. I understand the value of, 'I still sin, I still struggle. I still need to be reminded of my fallibility or my brokenness.' Yes, but you are a new creation. So your fundamental identity – and we all still struggle with this as it says in James – your fundamental identity has been radically altered in Christ. We'll just call it eschatological realism: I'm being pulled into my true identity."

Throughout *unChristian*, Kinnaman and Lyons sometimes insinuate that the problem is how the actions of Christians don't match up with their deeply held beliefs about themselves, God, and all reality.

But sometimes the larger problem is that they do.

[6] (54) Kinnaman is appalled that 18 percent of "born-again" Busters are having pre- or extra-marital sex, 24 percent are getting drunk, and 25 percent purchase lottery tickets. While it's true that these numbers are discouraging, is it possible that the contrast in statistics between Busters and other generations of Christians has more to do with openness and honesty (to the survey) than a generational gap in conduct (which likely exists, but maybe the disparity in statistics does not fully reflect the conduct of older Christians)? What do you think?

[7] (55) What praiseworthy things does it say about younger generations that major American corporations (marketed by and to younger Americans) are advertising their flaws and shortcomings as well as the challenges their corporation faces?

How can communities of faith learn from "Radical Transparency" that is coming on the scene in boardrooms across the nation?

[8] (55-56) The authors tell the story of a Los Angeles-area church that did a five-week series called “Confessions of a Sinful Church,” in which they apologized for self-righteousness and hypocrisy, the endorsement of slavery, mistreatment of homosexuals, Medieval Crusades, and for saying the Earth is flat. Why might those particular apologies be important for a church communicating with its community? Are there different or additional apologies you would include in your own confessions?

What is the significance of apologizing for the words and actions of past Christians – decisions over which you, personally, had no control?

#### BALANCING POINT: WE ARE ALWAYS SETTLING FOR LESS THAN OUR STORY

(57) The authors write that “we do not attain perfection in this life.”

The problem here is that the authors are inviting us to set a lower standard than that which Christ set for us: himself (and he was perfect, by the way). What the Bible says is that Christ is our standard, that we are restored, and God wants us to return to the holiness and wholeness that was fractured in Eden.

We can and should admit when we fall short of our standard. And we should also stop making excuses for ourselves already. We need to quit with all of our jargon about how we can't do anything (even though Christ has made a Way for us) and we're just waiting for Jesus to come back and rescue us (giving the promise of a Second Coming the place in our story that was meant for Christ's Resurrection). That's screwed up.

God, through the person of Jesus, has made holiness and wholeness available. If we choose brokenness instead, it's not God's fault – the blame lands on us and us only. Is the sting and carryover from the Fall still a real hindrance for us? Sure, but Jesus is bigger than that sting, bigger than the Fall itself. We need to ask ourselves what Jesus really accomplished through the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and why Paul's letter to the Romans emphasizes the metaphor of Jesus as “Second Adam.”

The Apostle Paul seems to believe that Jesus sincerely broke the curse of sin and that participating in Christ's faithfulness and righteousness effectively leads believers out of sin's mire (Romans 6). Why might we avoid the implications of Paul's writing? Why do we lower the expectations rather than raising the standards?

When we talk about our sin and who is at fault for fallenness, do we take personal responsibility or do we speak of sin in a way that downplays the effectiveness of Christ?

The authors of *unChristian* are correct in their assessment that Busters and Mosaics crave authenticity. Totally. And isn't taking responsibility for our sin part of authenticity? Isn't saying “I have everything I need to choose what's right, and sometimes in my idiocy I still choose things that are broken and corrupt and lost” part of honest dialogue and authentic living?

**BALANCING POINT: IF YOU'RE FOLLOWING CHRIST'S LEAD**

Chapter Three ends with brief contributions from various pastors and writers prominent within Christian circles. Reading through the contributions to this chapter, we might get the impression that sin is way more kosher than the Bible makes it out to be.

If we read the contributions (and really the bulk of Chapter Three) carefully, we get a really bizarre dichotomy regarding sin. On the one hand, when it comes to our language and sexuality, we get the impression that we as redeemed Christians are entirely trapped in sin and there's nothing we can do about it. We might as well get over with it, our inevitable sin. (The inference is that the label "sinners" looms over us more strongly than banners of "restored," "reconciled," "priesthood," and "set apart.")

On the flip side, the contributors speak of social justice to the needy and the ability to love others as something we're fully equipped to do; we're hypocrites if we fail to get it done.

Hmm.

Are we seeing the double-standard between these two types of sin? Why would we think that God views sin with this categorical separation? Either we have a way out of sin or we don't, and it applies to all sin. That much is obvious. If Jesus has restored us so that we can be agents of love and social justice, he's also provided us everything we need to be sexually pure and uplifting in our speech.

Churches in American history have swung along this pendulum between a "social gospel" (helping the needy, bringing about justice for marginalized people, etc.) and a "holiness gospel" (pursuing purity in ethics and conduct). Even today, many churches tend to emphasize one and diminish the other. But both are necessary components of true Christianity. (And really the "social" issues have a lot to do with holiness and the "holiness" issues have a lot to do with society.)

Either the Christ-event works or it doesn't. If it does work, then it applies to holiness and social issues alike, and we are free to walk in Jesus' Way and do what is right in situations of all types.

# CHAPTER FOUR: GET SAVED!

## CHAPTER FOUR QUESTIONS

- [1] In what ways are previous approaches to evangelism (whether it's the door-to-door method, little tracts, bulk mailings, or showy community events) unhelpful? What do people in other areas of culture (politics, marketing, sports, film, etc.) do right in getting "important" messages out to people that Christians sometimes miss?
- [2] What is the difference between making converts and making disciples? What should we read into Jesus' choice of words (reflective of his own ministry) as he commissioned the first Christians (Matthew 28:18-20)?
- [3] (72) Apologetics have very little to do with sincere evangelism. On top of that, how has an obsession with apologetics tarnished the way that *Christians* understand Christianity?
- [4] (73) Kinnaman says "we must work hard to strengthen the often-tenuous faith of teenagers, because this is when their faith is gelling". Why is it important that Christian teenagers be immersed in spiritual disciplines and prayer rather than simply learning a bunch of facts about how to "prove God"?

### BALANCING POINT

(73) "Only one-quarter of outsiders said they are looking for a faith that helps them connect with God." What kind of stat is that? If they were looking for that connection with God, some of them probably wouldn't be *outsiders*. Just saying.

[5] What should be our foremost goal: getting people to adhere to Christianity as it exists today, or addressing the weaknesses of Christianity – trying to recapture God’s vision for the Church and making Christianity something worth believing?

### MORE TO CONSIDER: THE WRONG SALVATION

(79) Kinnaman writes, “Intentionally or not, we promote the idea to outsiders that being a Christ follower is primarily about the mere choice to convert. We do not portray it as an all-out, into-the-kingdom enlistment that dramatically influences all aspects of life.”

Maybe the salvation message isn’t catching on because of how we describe it. And – digging toward the root of the problem – maybe it’s because what we teach and believe about salvation is different than the Scripture way of salvation.

We’re so concerned with getting people to say the right words, to utter the right prayers and propositions. Try finding the precedent for that in Scripture. Kinnaman notes the Luke 23 account of the criminal crucified next to Christ. This guy doesn’t say any of the typical “sinner’s prayer” jargon. All he does is ask to join Jesus’ Kingdom.

Maybe the guy was on to something.

People outside of Christianity find the just-say-the-prayer approach to evangelism a bit ridiculous. They’re correct for feeling that way. Maybe if we start teaching salvation as God invented it, then outsiders will understand what’s so *Good* about the Good News.

The bulk of American Christianity is littered with misunderstandings about who and how God saves. What we have today is a view of salvation that reflects the individualism of Western culture and not the Kingdom message of Christ. We’ve drawn a picture of individual salvation, where each one of us just needs to say the right prayer, make Jesus our homeboy, and we’re set.

It sure seems like the Bible says something different. [It’s okay to gasp here.] Jesus didn’t come to save individuals. He came to save his Church (aka the Bride of Christ). What is salvation? Salvation is when you join the Church (notice this is *Church*, not *church* – we’re talking about the People of God, not some random congregation).

So what’s the difference? What’s the distinction? Why does this matter?

The answer is mission. Mission, mission, mission. Say it until you’re blue in the face. *Mission*.

While salvation is something God does to us, it’s also something He has us do to others. This was the most blatantly obvious thing to the earliest followers of Jesus, who understood Judaism well enough to know the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12), the context of Mosaic Law, and the words of Israel’s prophets. God’s followers are blessed *to be a blessing*.

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**MORE TO CONSIDER: CONTINUED**

Being saved has nothing to do with status. It's about getting to work. There's no such thing as receiving Christ other than to join his Kingdom (if you don't join his Kingdom, then you're completely ignoring everything he ever said). And his Kingdom is not about being saved; it's about bringing salvation! It's about God's will being done on Earth as it is in heaven, bringing brokenness back to beauty.

When we join God's Kingdom, we become the ones who enact His mission. You want to know what the Good News is? *God wants to save the world.* And we're invited to not only inherit the blessing of that, but we get to be the ones who change the world for others.

It's fairly simple: God has blessed us and we bless others; as we bless others, they're free to join us – becoming both the “blessed” and the “blessers”. God's justice is going to prevail, and everyone who desires it will receive the holiness and wholeness made possible by Jesus.

*That is Good News. That is salvation.*

For some reason we've gotten miles away from preaching that. But it's never too late to get back to the truth, living out God's mission, building His Kingdom, and inviting others into a gospel that is truly good.

[6] (83-84) Regardless of how we refine our understanding of salvation and the way we express it toward others, there will be people in our society who are agitated by our eagerness to talk about God. “Some people contend that Christians should not talk about Jesus at all or send missionaries anywhere, since that might somehow offend people. This is a serious threat to Christianity because it essentially says evangelism can be traded for the path of minimal resistance.”

Why it is important that are *foremost* goal not be to please everyone and offend nobody? How can we be courteous to people who loathe Christianity without letting them (and not God) tell us how and where we can spread God's Kingdom?

**MORE TO CONSIDER: DON'T SKIP THE CONTRIBUTORS**

Make sure to read the end-of-chapter contributions from Chuck Colson, Andy Stanley, and Rick McKinley. They're saying some good things (even if Colson's understanding of the religious factors involved with the formation of Constantine's Empire is a little sketch).

# CHAPTER FIVE: ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL

## MORE TO CONSIDER: WE'D BE KIDDING IF WE SAID THIS WAS EASY

Alrighty. Nothing makes for tense conversation like approaching the most delicate social issue of our day. By far the most difficult chapter of the book in terms of complexity and sensitivity, Chapter Five calls us to confront our views of homosexual behavior and the people who engage in it.

Without being too compartmental, we need to create a distinction between political conversation and spiritual conversation (even if the difference between those is blurry in some ways). Within a church community there may be variance in approach to the politics surrounding homosexual marriage and/or civil unions. Hot-button political issues are probably not the wisest or calmest starting point for intra-church dialogue.

A better starting point might be to determine what we understand God to be objectively communicating to us regarding homosexual practice. Equally important, what do we know about how God wants us as Christians to relate with all human beings? With that information in mind, we can lovingly and discerningly form conclusions about our relationship with homosexuality and its practitioners.

If that line of thought leads us to differing conclusions (and political ramifications), that's understandable. Where we need to do everything we can to be on the same page is in regard to the first two questions: *How does God feel about homosexuality?* and *How does God ask us to treat all human beings?*

A prayer for us as we think and discuss homosexuality: *God, help us to love people well. Help us to love You and your design and intent for us. It's our prayer that, as Your Kingdom advances, our sexuality (like everything else) would be perfectly transformed into something You see as beautiful and whole and good. Please guide us away from assuming more or less about homosexuality than what You're saying to us. May we never make scapegoats out of human beings whom You love. Amen.*

## CHAPTER FIVE QUESTIONS

[1] As a Christian, have you ever felt backed into a corner by non-Christians in regard to your view of homosexuality?

Is it even possible to contend that homosexuality is not sexuality as God intended it without being labeled a "homophobe"?

- [2] (93) How do you feel about the author's line: "We cannot underestimate how a morally relativistic generation, along with sophisticated media and political strategies, have created a tinder box for Christians' reputations in this regard"?
- [3] (93) Why does it harm all Christians when a handful of loud-mouth "Christians" declare that 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina are God's judgment on homosexuals? How should we express to homosexual friends our feelings about bogus sound-bites?
- [4] (95) Research indicates that only 14 percent of "born-again Christians" would be highly motivated to help HIV/AIDS orphans overseas. What are three reasons why that mentality toward this disease and those orphans is ignorant and pathetic? Where in Scripture do we find Jesus dealing much differently than that with people suffering from illnesses with attached stigmas in his day?
- [5] (96) Consider the quote from Billy Graham: "I'm going to quote the Bible now, not myself, that it [homosexuality] is wrong, it's a sin. But there are other sins. Why do we jump on that sin as through it's the greatest sin? The greatest sin in the Bible is idolatry, worshipping other things besides the true and living God. Jealousy is a sin. Pride is a sin. All of these things are sins. But homosexuality is also a sin and needs to be dealt with and needs to be forgiven, and that's why Christ came and died on the cross."
- What do you think of Graham's words? Do you find them helpful or unhelpful? Do you feel like his approach would be received well by people (Christians included) who sit at either extreme end of the Left-Right political spectrum?
- [6] (101) Do you feel that Buster and Mosaic Christians, in direct opposition to older generations of Christians, are of the opinion that it is acceptable to be a political advocate of homosexuality, but that political opposition to homosexuality is an unacceptable faux pas?

- [7] How do you feel about Kinnaman's determination that "While most young churchgoers believe the Bible does not condone homosexuality, their conviction about this is waning, and they are embarrassed by the church's treatment of gays and lesbians"?
- [8] How can both the mistreatment of other humans or an anything-goes approach to sexuality tamper with the Church's duty to be a light to the world? Is there a third way, a way of living out Christianity with obedience and conviction as well as a generous and gracious love for others?

**BALANCING POINT: PROTECTING THE UNBORN TENDS TO OFFEND SOME PEOPLE**

(106-107) The Chapter Five section "Expressing Concern For Kids" takes the complexity and sensitivity surrounding homosexuality to a whole new level. For those Christians who believe that homosexuality is a damaged *and damaging* form of sexuality, why would they sit on their hands and watch as unborn or newly born children with no say in the matter are placed in familial situations that could – in the minds of anyone who believes that homosexuality is a distortion of sexuality – psychologically alter kids for life?

A Christian can be an advocate of homosexuals' rights, but what about being an advocate for the unborn – truly the weakest and neediest among us? When did caring for their right to not only live but grow up in life-giving situations stop being a social justice issue?

- [9] (111) In the "Changing the Perceptions" section at the end of the chapter, Shayne Wheeler quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of *every* human being." In situations of discussing someone else's life choices, why is it important to acknowledge that we have made destructive decisions in our own lives?

- [10] 10. (114) Reflect on the following statement from Sarah Raymond Cunningham: "God doesn't want me to do things even he [sic] does not choose to do – to control or hijack someone's freedom."

- [11] (110-119) Look through the entire "Changing the Perceptions" section. Which ideas or quotes from the various contributors best resonated with you?

# CHAPTER SIX: SHELTERED

## BALANCING POINT: UM, WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING?

(122) The book continues to ride statistics from those outside of Christianity to make underwhelming points. “Only one-fifth of young outsiders believe that an active faith helps people live a better, more fulfilling life.” What exactly were they expecting? Wouldn’t it be a little weird if four-fifths of those *outside* the Church thought that the biggest thing their life was missing was a sense of purpose and connectedness with their Creator? While the book has plenty of great insights, some of these stats are not as shocking as the book would have us believe.

## CHAPTER SIX QUESTIONS

- [1] (123) “Two-thirds of young outsiders said the faith is boring, a description embraced by one-quarter of young churchgoers as well. The image of being sheltered means the Christian faith seems dull, flat, and lifeless.”

In what ways does this opinion toward Christianity reflect your own thoughts about the religion? In what ways do you find typical church services to be the problem here? How might misunderstandings of Christ’s message lead to a boring existence for Christians?

## MORE TO CONSIDER: ARE YOU A FLAT EARTH CHRISTIAN?

(123) One of the contributing factors to the stigma that Christians are a bunch of uneducated morons is that, in the past, Christians have tried to go Bible Kung-Fu on the world of science for no good reason and to no avail.

It’s a sure thing that we’re getting into trouble when we try to use the Bible as things it isn’t meant to be – a science book or a history text (there’s a difference between being historically credible and being, by *genre* and nature, a history book), to name a couple.

Throughout history Christians have used their Bibles to determine the shape and age of our planet. We’re doing a disservice to Scripture when we handle it this way. It comes across as unintelligent when we try to get involved in other disciplines in an authoritative way without really engaging the information and evidence that exists in the given discipline.

How has this mentality that the Bible is the only book worth reading aided the perception Christians are sheltered?

**MORE TO CONSIDER: DON'T KILL THE QUESTIONER**

Since when is it evil to question? The Protestant Reformation was the product of people taking a stand against misinformation and a misrepresentation of the Gospel. Yet shortly after the Reformation, a “no questions” policy became the status-quo among Protestants. Catechisms took the place of doubt and dialogue.

One leader of the Reformed movement, John Calvin, had a guy named Michael Servetus burned at the stake for questioning the popular Trinity theology of his day. Another man, Sebastian Castellio, came after Calvin for the theology-inspired murder. The result? Calvin used his religious and political leverage to keep Castellio’s criticisms from being published.

Nowadays, even the bullies within Christianity probably aren’t going to cap you for asking the wrong questions. But they’ll find a way to muzzle and discredit you. The Protestant Church has become creepily similar to that against which it originally protested.

So who’s going to protest against the Protestants? Where is the modern Castellio to keep today’s Calvin in check? The point isn’t to muzzle the Calvins of the world; it’s to make sure that Servetus doesn’t get killed this time around, that questions and doubts and musings are welcomed into theological discussion.

What are the fundamental differences between a faith community where questions are invited and a community in which questioners are viewed as defectors and disrupters?

[2] (125) Kinnaman explains that Mosaics and Busters do well in understanding mystery, uncertainty, and ambiguity, and understand the role of contextualization when addressing intricate issues. How might Christianity, with its blend of clear answers and direction as well as mystery and complexity, *need* Busters and Mosaics? Why are they the perfect torchbearers to lead Christianity out of the modernist era, ridding Christianity of false confidence and fatalism and re-embracing the narrative and mystery that allow people to radically experience a loving God?

[3] (126) What do you think will happen when “a generation asking big questions and expressing candid doubts” encounters a God of love and grandeur whose Spirit is powerfully present? What are some reasons this could be – literally and figuratively – a match made in heaven?

[4] (127) Why is it important that Mosaics and Busters, who grew up in a culture of rising divorce rates, abortions, and sexual promiscuity meet their God? What things do you imagine God might want to say to the members of these generations? What specific needs of theirs might He want to meet?

- [5] (130) While it's natural for Christians to want to have close friendships with other Christians (they have more than just "something" in common – they share a central starting ground around which their entire lives are built), why is it important for churches not to just fill people's schedule with a bunch of "stuff" that keeps them from being present and available in general culture? Why is it harmful for a church to become a city unto itself?
- [6] (130-133) What's the difference between participating in impure things and being around people who do impure things? If there's a difference, which of those approaches did Jesus embody?
- [6b] While many Christians today fall into two extreme camps – Christians who avoid people who aren't pure enough for them, and Christians who engage in the impurity themselves – is there room for a third approach to engaging culture? What might that look like?
- [7] (141) Consider Margaret Feinberg's words: "wake up to the cold reality that you're part of the plan. You have a role in this generation, not only receiving the baton of faith but passing it on to the next generation. *You have a role in preserving the earth, protecting the poor, defending the exploited*" (italics added).
- Connect Feinberg's point with some of our Chapter Four discussion, that salvation, as God sees it, is not about making people say the right prayer in order to "solve the soul problem"; accepting Christ is the decision to enter and participate in his Kingdom.
- What might happen if the Christian community is willing to undergo some critique from within and decides to correct the unclear and unhelpful ways we've lived and explained salvation to others? Why might the Kingdom focus delivered in Scripture (and echoed here by Feinberg) be a major step in introducing Mosaics and Busters to their God?
- [8] (141-152) Read through the various contributions to the "Changing the Perceptions" section at the end of the chapter. What thoughts stick out to you? In what ways do you feel inspired to connect emerging generations with their God?

# CHAPTER SEVEN: TOO POLITICAL

## BALANCING POINT: IT DEPENDS WHERE

Chapter Seven is built on the notion that “Christians are primarily motivated by a political agenda and promote right-wing politics.”

That’s probably a very fair assessment of the politics of Christians in their fifties and sixties and/or living in Indiana and South Dakota (no offense to anyone in those demographics; just a generalization). Here’s the balancing point, though: if you’re in your twenties or thirties and are living along either of America’s coasts or a major urban center between the ponds, chances are many or most of the Christians you know vote to the political Left.

As you read Chapter Seven, consider how the statements of those injured by Christianity can apply to Christians of various political views. Left or Right, we’re in trouble when our lives are lived for the glory of a political platform, when our hope is placed in political agendas and leaders rather than Christ and his Kingdom.

## CHAPTER SEVEN QUESTIONS

[1] What are two things that each of America’s major political parties offers that reflect a bit of our agenda as the Kingdom of God?

[2] Why do you think it is that Christianity has spread more effectively when it is not a state religion than in those times when it has been an official or unofficial theocracy?

## MORE TO CONSIDER: THANKS FOR THE HELP?

Take a look at this *International Herald Tribune* article (<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2009/01/07/europe/07london.php>) regarding the popularization and marketing of Atheism. How do you feel about a political climate in which this movement exists and is free to gain traction? In what ways is Christianity helped by such efforts on the part of Atheists?

[3] (165) How have Christians in both political parties come to “expect too much out of politics” as outsiders see it?

[4] Is it even appropriate for a Christian to belong to a political party?

**MORE TO CONSIDER: IDEOLOGIES, ILLUSIONS, AND IDOLATRY**

To learn more about the ways political agendas can and do ultimately rival the agenda of God's Kingdom, check out David T. Koyzis' book *Political Visions & Illusions*. Koyzis explains how every political ideology has its own worldview of origin, fall, salvation, and future hope, and how many of those notions are incompatible with the story of Scripture and Jesus' Kingdom vision. You might not come out of your reading agreeing with Koyzis, but he'll give you plenty to think about.

[5] Why might it be dangerous for Christians to try to bring about God's Kingdom in politically-centered ways rather than in the context of faith communities? Can you articulate the difference between Christians who participate in politics and Christians who want the government to do the work of caring for the widow and the orphan? Why is it important that the *Church* be the Church – for the sake of those we help and for our own sake?

# CHAPTER EIGHT: JUDGMENTAL

## CHAPTER EIGHT QUESTIONS

- [1] (Pgs 182-183) Chapter Eight begins with the story of Lisa, a young woman who had an abortion at one point, and her struggles to find empathy within Christian community. How can we respond to systemic sin such as abortion, genocide, and domestic violence in a way that acknowledges that both victims and victimizers exist within our communities? In what ways might we stress that we, as a church community and as individuals, are both the breakers and the broken?
- [2] What role does humility play in a life that is constantly being transformed into holiness?
- [3] Do we expect non-Christians to strive for the holiness that Christians pursue? If so, how might such thinking be misguided?
- [4] (185) The chart at the bottom of page 185, "A Loving Church," shows the disparity of pastors' view of church communities with that of their churchgoers (let alone people outside of church community). What are some reasons a pastor might have a more favorable perspective than the average churchgoer? Which of these groups surveyed represents the most accurate depiction of the congregation in your speculation?
- [5] What's the difference between false holiness (exemplified by some of the Pharisaic leaders Jesus encountered in his ministry) and true holiness (that which Jesus lived and to which he calls us)?

[6] (187-188) We don't need to be naive in order to avoid judgmental behavior. It's natural to see a person (or a book, city, house, etc.) and to make some observations and contextualization – forming *generalizations* (which are not inherently wrong – they're *generally* accurate). But do our generalizations leave room for understanding and compassion? Are we willing to learn about someone's story, or do we have people "figured out" after two minutes of conversation?

[7] How can handling Christianity in a *deterministic* sense (saying that our faith explains not only the deep meaning of existence, but why every daily event happens as it does or even *how* those events happen as they do) be over-stepping our bounds as Christians?

Is there a theological connection between mystery and humility?

[8] (190-191) It's possible that much of our judgment toward others is rooted in fear of them. When a youth pastor is worried about letting a certain "type" of kid into his youth group because that kid will "infect" his youth, isn't that a reflection of fear? Isn't it also a lack of confidence in the faith of those in the youth group? (Of course we'd need to know more of the story to say, lest we be judgmental toward this youth pastor...)

[9] (191-193) Why is it important for God's followers to be people who engage in critique from within, for confrontation and grace to start in relationships between Christians striving for holiness and wholeness rather than projecting Christian standards on those outside of the faith? If we can model a both accountability and humility toward one another, how will that speak to those outside of Christianity?

# CHAPTER NINE: FROM UNCHRISTIAN TO CHRISTIAN

## CHAPTER NINE QUESTIONS

[1] (Pgs 206-207) What is a valid response to criticism from those outside of Christianity? How can we learn from criticism even if we feel the criticism is not valid?

[2] (210) Why do relationships within a faith community matter just as much as relationships outside of that community? Why might those outside of Christianity observe our intra-church relationships with particular interest?

[3] (211) Why is it noble to search for new and creative language to explain some of the Gospel's complex realities (and its simple realities as well)?

[4] (211-212) Why might God call His Church away from proof-texts, "for the Bible tells me so" arguments, and an emphasis on propositional truth in exchange for genuine conversation and an understanding of truth as relational and narrative?

[5] Why does it matter that we understand that God's desire is for everyone to come to Him? How does that shape our view of each person's value and potential?