

24 Isn't Christianity about heaping guilt on people?

Isn't Christianity about heaping guilt on people? The thought of Christians as guilt burdened beings is alarming. It's the very opposite of what Jesus promises when he says '*my burden is light*' (Matthew 11:30).

Trouble is some harsh forms of evangelism have had the effect of doing people down rather than building them up. When people are in a hurry to communicate Christ they can make dangerous short cuts. 'You're a sinner because all are sinners and sinners are only good for hell!'

Brusher Mills was the last and most celebrated of the New Forest snake catchers. He died in 1905. A picture survives of him clutching a haul of adders in each hand.

Brusher was something of an eccentric. He'd got a particular way of winning favour with young ladies. He'd furtively drop an adder near a group of them and retreat until they screamed. Then he appeared and rescued them from deadly peril!

Some forms of Christianity run rather like that. They scare folk with hell fire, make them feel guilty, and then rescue them with the Saviour. Like Brusher's tactics for winning converts their methods are forced and fearful!

Part of the answer to the perception of Christianity as guilt burdening is to examine the methods by which we present the Lord. How much do these methods validate people as those loved by God and made in his image, and how much do they actually do people down?

Unless witnessing to Jesus is done in a natural and convivial way it can damage people and hinder their engagement with the Lord. They end up getting the bad news about their human condition without the good news of God's love.

Is Christianity guilt-ridden? Do Christian believers heap guilt upon people?

Guilt is the deep down feeling that you've done wrong. This is natural for human beings who're both made in God's image, with a sense of right and wrong, and yet so often fail to do and fall short of God.

We have God - Jesus- in our lives, scripture says in Romans Chapter 8 verse 10 but look back a few verses to Romans chapter 7, verse 20 and it tells us we also have sin living in us!

Jesus Christ comes into lives precisely because there is sin there that needs dealing with! The Founder of Christianity died and rose to bring us the forgiveness of sins which is the antidote to guilt.

Christianity is guilt-ridding not guilt-ridden.

Of course it's a very serious matter, facing up to your sins. It's altogether humiliating.

Guilt-ridding can only occur at a cost to our pride. We've got to admit we've sinned and to ask for forgiveness before we can *get rid*.

People don't like it. That's why Christian opposition to immoral behaviour is often resented. Some will always want to indulge themselves irrespective of the consequences to themselves and to society. If the church is said to have a guilt problem the world has a lack of guilt problem!

C S Lewis wrote that his own guilty feelings were like toothache. He delayed dealing with them just as he'd delay attending to a bad tooth out of fear of the dentist.

People refuse to face up to their sins and do something about them maybe because, unlike Lewis, they don't have a dentist, so to speak. They don't know that there *is* a provision in Jesus for overcoming sin.

The letter to the Hebrews speaks of '*laying aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely*' (12:1) as we run the race of the faith. This text captures the forward looking movement of Christian faith that blocked by the sins that trip us up.

People who won't face their sins can end up marking time on their spiritual journey. They complain about Christianity because it offers them a grace they've come to live without. It rattles their cage maybe!

Christianity's a holiness movement that won't rest with being held back by sin. It's always going to challenge where we're at, whether we've yet to start the journey of faith or we're actually on that journey

Jesus came to save the world and not to judge it but people have to give him the chance to save them by opening up their hearts for him to cleanse (John 12:47).

God always treats us as better than we are when we'll allow him access to our lives.

Jesus is about rubbing off sins - not about rubbing them in!

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