

The REASON for GOD

CHAPTER 4

Reading and Reflection

Chapter 4. The Church is Responsible for so Much Injustice

1 “The church has a history of supporting injustice, of destroying culture... If Christianity is the true religion, how could this be?” [52]. What examples are usually used to support this idea? Are they true? What is our response as believers to what others do in Jesus’ name?

2 “Many people who take an intellectual stand against Christianity,” Keller says, “do so against a background of personal disappointment with Christians and churches. We all bring to issues intellectual predispositions based on our experiences” [53]. Why are some people disappointed with their church experience? Do you understand why non-Christians might react the way they do? What is a healthy way to respond to people who are skeptical?

3 Keller says —“If Christianity is all it claims to be, shouldn’t Christians on the whole be much better people than everyone else?”—is actually based on a “mistaken belief” [54]. What is this mistaken belief Keller highlights?

4 “Violence done in the name of Christianity is a terrible reality and must be both addressed and redressed. There is no excusing it” [57]. How can our response to this idea shape the future potential for conversations with non-believers who hold this point of view?

5 “Perhaps the biggest deterrent to Christianity for the average person today is not so much violence and warfare but the shadow of fanaticism. Many nonbelievers have friends or relatives who have become ‘born again’ and seem to have gone off the deep end” [57]. Have you ever heard this objection to Christianity? How did they define “fanaticism” and “off the deep end”? To what extent would their definitions apply to you—or to your Christian friends?

6 “Think of people you consider fanatical,” Keller says. “They’re overbearing, self-righteous, opinionated, insensitive, and harsh. Why? It’s not because they are too Christian but because they are not Christian enough” [58]. In some sections of the church, however, the opposite conclusion would be drawn. How would you help such fanatics see they “are not Christian enough”?

7 “The tendency of religious people,” Keller says, “is to use spiritual and ethical observance as a lever to gain power over others and over God, appeasing him through ritual and good works” [61]. How have you seen churches use this “lever” to manipulate people into good behavior?

8 “In Jesus’ and the prophets’ critique, self-righteous religion is always marked by insensitivity to issues of social justice, while true faith is marked by profound concern for the poor and marginalized. The Swiss theologian John Calvin, in his commentaries on the Hebrew prophets, says that God so identifies with the poor that their cries express divine pain. The Bible teaches us that our treatment of them equals our treatment of God” [61]. How do you fare today by this standard? What do you do? What more could you lead others to do?

9 Keller mentions a number of examples of people who have helped the church to stop injustice and oppression [64]. Why is self-correction important for the church? What is the standard and what is the danger?

HOMework

- Read Matthew 5-7 (yes that’s 3 chapters!)
- What surprises you about some of the topics Jesus discusses?
- What was Jesus trying to accomplish through this message?
- Chose one of the people highlighted at the end of the chapter - do some additional research/reading.