

I would never go to that church! It is nothing but a cult. I hear they actually encourage incest and practice cannibalism! Well, friends, I hope you would never go to a church like that. It sounds like it might be a group of Satanists. Yet, this is pretty much how the Ancient Romans viewed Christians in the first century and second century. Why? Well, the early Christians would hold weekly “Love Feasts,” where they would enjoy a meal together and then celebrate the Lord’s Supper. No big deal, right? Kind of a pot-luck dinner combined with communion. Yet, because of persecution, these were usually private meetings, and there was a lot of speculation what these “*Love Feasts*” involved. The fact that Christians, even married couples, called each other brother and sister, raised suspicions concerning incest. Putting all this together left many Romans with a very inaccurate idea of Christian worship services. They assumed the Love Feasts were drunken orgies. But the misunderstanding was even worse. Christians spoke of “Eating the Body” and “Drinking Blood” of Jesus. That is, of course, the symbolic language Jesus himself used to describe our relationship with Him. (John 6:56) Yet, the Romans wrongly assumed that Christians were cannibalizing infants. That is why many Roman’s believed Christians were a group of immoral cultists.

Friends, I do not think anyone thinks Chisholm Baptist Church is an immoral cult that practices incest and cannibalism. But....Some folks out there have pretty inaccurate and pretty wild ideas about this church and what we are about. In recent weeks we have been talking about what Americans believe about God, the Gospel, Jesus, etc. We have focused on how we as Christians need to respond. Now, in a couple of weeks, we will return to our journey through the Gospel of Luke. Today, however, we turn our attention to what Americans believe about us, about Evangelical or Bible believing Christians. We will explore what other folks on the Iron Range likely think about Chisholm Baptist Church. Since our desire is to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ, effectively representing Him in our community, this is an important topic. So let’s pause and pray the Lord, through His word and spirit, would give us insight and understanding today.

Some of you may already be thinking, “Pastor Dan I do not get it. Shouldn’t we focus on what God thinks about us, not what on other people think? Of course, people out there are not going to like us. As Jesus said, **John 15:18, “The world has hated me, expect them to hate you.”** Friends, all that is true. And we need to be willing to stand up and speak up for what is true, right, and good even if it will make other folks very unhappy. However, we always want to make sure people do not like us for the right reasons. If people do

not like us because of wrong actions or attitudes on our part, that is not pleasing to God. The Apostle Peter

told Roman slaves who were Christians, **1 Peter 2:20 – Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are punished for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.** So you may think you are being ridiculed at work because of your faith, but if the real reason people do not like you is because you are rude and obnoxious, the Lord is not pleased. I also believe that if people out there oppose us it should be because of our faithfulness to the Gospel, not because they have an incorrect or very distorted understanding of what we believe and practice. If someone doesn’t like me because she thinks I am narrow minded for insisting that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to experience God’s salvation, that’s ok. That is what I believe. But if someone doesn’t like me because he thinks I practice cannibalism on Sunday mornings, or because I think all homosexuals should be executed, that is not ok, but that is not what I do or believe.

In **1 Peter 3:15** the Lord tells us **in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, being ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.** “Give a defense” The Greek word is “Apologia.” It is from where we get the term “Apologetics, Defending the Faith.” There are two parts to this defense. One is providing reason or evidence for what we believe. “This is why I believe the Bible can be trusted. Or “This is why I believe Jesus rose from the dead.” The second part of the defense is refuting false accusations. No, we do not practice

cannibalism at our church. No, I do not believe homosexuals should be executed. Or when talking to a Muslim, “No, I do not believe that Jesus was born because of a sexual union between God and Mary.” There is also a third aspect of Apologetics, which is kind of the offensive part. This involves pointing out errors and weaknesses of other religions or world views. That might involve reminding an Atheist that if God does not exist, there is really no basis for objective meaning or morality, or pointing out to a Jehovah Witness how many times their church has been wrong about the date of Jesus' return. All three dimensions of Apologetics are important, but clearing up misunderstandings that people have about Christianity, Bible Christianity, is often the place we need to start.

So, what are some of the misunderstandings that people have? I do not know of a study that provides a comprehensive answer to that question. Twelve years ago David Kinnaman wrote a book entitled “Unchristian” which explored the objectiveness Millennials were expressing about Evangelical Christianity. I suspect many of these concerns have only intensified since then. Today, we will focus on four common misunderstandings of Christianity and explore how we as Christians might help others see the truth.

#1 Misunderstanding..Is that *Christians are against sex*. Indeed our concerns about sexual morality often make us seem a little old fashioned and a little odd in our sex obsessed culture. However, it is important that we understand reality and help others understand as well. Christians are not against sex anymore then we are against fire. We love fire, but we want it to be kept in the fireplace, where it belongs, not out in the living room. We want sex to be kept where it belongs, in the marriage relationship. That is the best thing. Surveys find that married couples who attend church regularly have more satisfying sexual relationships than anyone else. One of the interesting things that has happened over the last few years is a growing disenchantment with the “Sexual Revolution” which has dominated our culture for over 50 years. Christianity was born into a culture where there were often few if any sexual constraints...for upper class Roman citizens. Female and male slaves often were required to provide sexual favors for their masters. Christianity's insistence that a monogamists

marriage was the proper context for a sexual relationship meant that relationship needed to be *consensual*. The “Me too Movement,” is not without flaws, especially in their thinking about how the Judicial system should work, but I am in total agreement with them that a sexual relationship should always be consensual and loving. It should be like what is found in a monogamists marriage. Rather than being way behind the times and being against sex, Christians have been out front in pointing out the many ways a sexual relationship can be abused and the many ways people can suffer deep emotional wounds because of that abuse. In **1 Thessalonians 4:3** The Apostle Paul writes **God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual immorality**. His primary concern is that we live in a way that honors the Lord, but he also wants us to avoid the hurt and damage sexual immorality involves. Christians are not against fire, we just want it kept in the fireplace, we are not against sex, we just want it to be experienced in the way God intends.

#2 A related accusation and misunderstanding is that Evangelicals *hate* homosexuals or LGBT people. Let me share a conversation I had with my friend Joe. “Joe, I do not hate LGBT people. I believe they are human beings made in the image of God. The Lord commands me to love each and everyone of them.” “But, Dan you told me you believe homosexuality is wrong, that is a sin.” “Yes, I said that because it is true. That is what the Bible teaches in **Romans 1:26-27** and other places. I believe homosexual behavior is wrong. But just because I do not approve of someones actions, doesn't mean I do not love them. I have four sons. Many times I have disapproved of their actions and I have not hesitated to express that disapproval. But that doesn't mean I do not love them, and I think they know that.” “So, you do not hate that gal across the street from you who is a lesbian?” “Do you mean Sue? Of course not! She is my friend. Joe, let me explain. Sue, like a number of folks out there, struggles with same-sex attraction. That is really a temptation, not a sin. We all face temptations. When Sue gives into that temptation, it is wrong, she has sinned. When I give into temptation, for example have a selfish , proud or lustful thought, I have sinned too. As human beings we are all kind of in the same boat. We are sinners, who need a savior.

“So, Dan if you do not hate LGBT people, why are you against same-sex marriage?” Oh, Joe, my view on marriage has nothing to do with liking or not liking anyone. Jesus says, **Matthew 19:4b, 5, God who created them in the beginning made them male and female⁵ and he also said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'** Now, I can not control how the State of Minnesota, or the United States Supreme Court defines marriage, but as a Christian, I define it as Jesus does, a relationship between one man and one woman. I do not hate anyone. I'm not mad at anyone. I just cannot ignore what Jesus teaches.” Well, friends, I hope some of the things I said to Joe might be helpful in conversations you have with others. Next Sunday, Pastor Jared Bangs from Cook will be here and his topic is “Restoring Sexual Sanity.” He will be addressing a variety of issues that fall under that umbrella, and talk about how we as Christians can respond with truth and love. That is next Sunday.

#3 Accusation against Evangelical Christians today is that we are “Anti-Science.” This usually includes the implication that we are simply anti-intellectual, anti-education, and pretty much big fans of ignorance. Now, unfortunately there are Christians who seem proud of their lack of knowledge and understanding. That is foolish. As the Apostle says, **1 Corinthians 14:20 -- ESV Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.** Indeed understanding truth, which should be our goal, involves growing in knowledge and wisdom. And though one does not need formal education to do that, Christians have long been education advocates. We have been big promoters of literacy, because we are people of the book. We think it so important that people learn how to read, so they can read the Bible. Most of the great universities of Europe were started by Christians, and the top universities in the United States were founded by Evangelical Christians. The motto of Harvard, for example used to be, “Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae,” or in English “Truth for Christ and the Church.” The Anti-Intellectualism that is seeping into our universities is not coming from Evangelicals, but from Post-Modernists and Proponents of critical theory who claim objective truth doesn't exist and that we are free to create our own truth. Interestingly, in Philosophy departments, where

people do the most thinking about thinking, Christianity is growing and thriving among both students and faculty. Incidentally, outside of the university setting, the hot spot for Anti-Intellectualism is the New Age Movement. People sleeping with crystals in their bed to increase out of body experiences and facilitate more vivid dreams should probably be considered “Anti-Science.”

Now the specific charge of Christians being Anti-Science usually comes, not because we oppose science, but because we oppose “Scientism.” The latter is a philosophy, which says there must be a naturalistic explanation for everything. That means there can not be a supernatural explanation, meaning there can be no God. As Christians, we maintain science should follow the evidence where ever, it leads, even to a supernatural explanation. This is most obvious in the battle between proponents of New-Darwinian Evolution and those who believe in intelligent design. Intelligent design says that numerous questions, including how did the universe begin? And how did life begin? Can not be answered by science. The evidence points to an intelligent designer. An honest person needs to at least consider the possibility that **Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

Friends, the history of science includes a long list of Godly individuals such as Isaac Newton, Johan Kepler, Robert Boyle and many others. Christian scientists believe God has created the physical universe and not only allows, but commands us to explore, understand, use and care for this world. At least that is how they understand **Genesis 1:26** and the commission the Lord gave human beings “Have Dominion” over the earth. Christians are not Anti-Science. We may be against Scientism, we may criticize Darwinian Theory, but we are not Anti-Science and not big fans of ignorance.

#4 Accusation against Evangelical Christians is that we are narrow minded and arrogant because we claim our religion is the only right one and all other religions are wrong. Well, I suspect there are narrow minded, arrogant Christians, who will say something like this: “I grew up in a Baptist Church, I have always been a Baptist. I would never consider any other religion or denomination. It is obvious God wants everyone

to be Baptist.” That does sound a little narrow minded and arrogant. If we are seeking the truth, which I think all of us should be, we need to consider alternatives. But we also should reach some conclusions.

Many folks like to use this analogy. There are many different roads, different religions, at the bottom of the mountain. Yet, they all lead to the same destination the top of the mountain, where God is. Thus, all religions lead to heaven. Behind that analogy, however, there is very questionable claim. One, which I believe is rather arrogant. The person talking about the mountain, is claiming he or she somehow *knows* that all roads lead to the top. They apparently have this bird's eye view which enables them to trace the precise path every road takes. Friends, there is no way I can know whether all roads, all religions lead to God or not. In fact, I believe only one person on earth has ever had that knowledge. That is Jesus. He made this claim. **John 14:6 – I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** This is not what I am saying about Jesus, but what Jesus says about himself. And folks, for a variety of reasons, I am confident Jesus knew what He was talking about.

Friends, you have to decide if Jesus was right about that. Or was He simply delusional, believing things about himself that were not true? Or was he trying to deceive, making up the claim to manipulate people some way? Yes, to say Jesus was telling the truth maybe sounds narrow minded. But, we often view exclusive claims that way. However, if an exclusive claim is true, it is hardly narrow minded. If an ad claims, crest is the only toothpaste you can use and that if you brush with any other brand all your teeth will fall out, you know that is a foolish claim. If, however, your doctor says, you need to take this pill, because it is the only known medicine that can stop this virus from killing you, that is an exclusive claim that you want to take very seriously. Friends, the real question that everyone needs to answer is not whether Jesus' claim is too exclusive or narrow minded, but whether or not it is true. That is the most important question in the world.

Ok, friends, those are responses to four common misunderstandings people in our society have about Christianity. That is a way of obeying **1 Peter 3:15** and making a defense of the hope we have through Jesus. Even though we are not to be

“People Pleasers,” we do want to be “People Persuaders.” We are, as Chuck Colson used to say, in “A Battle for Hearts and Minds.” Those who disagree with us are not our enemies, but the people we want to persuade. We want to see the folks around us who are unbelievers, who often express disdain and even hatred for Christianity, turn to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Like the Apostle Paul, **2 Corinthians 5:11 – Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others.** We are not content to just proclaim truth. We want to, by God's grace, persuade people to embrace the truth. We try to speak the right words in order to clear up misunderstandings, and we also want to exhibit the right attitudes so that people will be more likely to listen to us. After Peter tells us to make our defense of the Gospel he adds, **1 Peter 3:16 – Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.**

Does that mean everyone will like us? No. But it means God will be pleased when we, ambassadors of Jesus Christ, let our light shine, reflecting the glory of Christ, to what seems to be an increasingly dark and confused world.