

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

#4 Christianity is Fundamentalist – The Bible

In last week's Sydney Morning Herald, there was an article by Joe Hockey, Federal Shadow Minister for Finance. The article was titled 'God is good, but just be sure not to take Him too literally' and the opening went like this:

"One reason why Christian faith has declined in the West is because of the reliance placed on a literal reading of the testaments. Such an approach has tangled the Christian faith in a confusion of contradictions.

By encouraging literalist analysis of the Bible, many churches have inadvertently invited people to question the validity of a faith that seems to be based on *questionable facts or outdated prescriptions.*"

Joe Hockey's comments provide a very good summary of the viewpoint that people take the bible too literally, ie. Christianity is 'fundamentalist'. And there seems to be two thoughts behind this criticism, 1) that the text of the bible is unreliable (*questionable facts*) and 2) what is in the text should not be treated as something authoritative (*outdated prescriptions*) for all of life.

Questionable Facts?

There are many things that could be discussed on this point, but let's focus our attention on the historical reliability of the New Testament documents. Let's focus our attention even further on one event recorded in the documents of New Testament, that is, the resurrection of Jesus. If this event is untrue, it makes all of the New Testament an unreliable source for history.

Discuss: The first followers of Jesus said that Jesus was made alive again. But if Jesus did in fact *not* rise from the dead, what reasons can you give for their testimony?

Read these verses and discuss:

John 19:32-35

John 20:1-10

John 20:24-29

Luke 1:1-4 & 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. What do these 2 passages importantly show us:

The plight of the first followers of Jesus is that they:

This is a very important point to be clear on—Paul and Luke are not making a claim centuries after the event and then saying, 'just believe me'. They're writing very early after the events (Paul—around 20-30 years after Jesus' death, Luke around 50 years after) and when they speak of the resurrection they speak of eye-witnesses who are still alive. In other words, the implication is there for the original readers—if you don't believe Paul & Luke, talk to others who were there.

What other historical issues did Garnet refer to on Sunday? Was any of it particularly helpful?

Outdated Prescriptions?

What 'outdated prescriptions' do you think Joe Hockey could be referring to?

When a person reads the bible, what advice can you give so they better understand what the bible teaches us today?

Do you find any of these points helpful for yourself?

The Bible & Its Place

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17

To say that the bible is 'God-breathed', what does this mean?

What does it not mean?

What does this passage say about the Scriptures place in a Christian's life?

What does it mean for us that the Scripture can correct and rebuke? How do you feel about that?