

## Christ > Christians

The story is told of a zoo that was noted for their great collection of animals from across the globe. One day, the gorilla died, and to keep up appearances, the zookeeper hired a man to wear a gorilla suit and fill in for the dead animal.

On his first day on the job, the man didn't know how to act like a gorilla very well. As he tried to move about his cage more convincingly, he climbed onto some rocks, and then fell into the lion enclosure. He became screaming, convinced his was over. The lion stalked over and whispered to him. "Be quiet, or you're going to get us both fired."

Many would say this zoo is quite like the church – full of people pretending to be something they are not.

In the history books, Mahatma Gandhi was the man at the center of India's fight for freedom from the British Empire. Gandhi was raised a Hindu, a faith he confessed throughout his life, but he also described himself as a lifelong seeker of truth, love, and purity.

During his travels and studies, Gandhi had the opportunity to study the Christian faith as well as converse with many Christians. He was deeply intrigued by Jesus whom he found profoundly compelling. He would frequently quote from Jesus' teachings, but ultimately, he rejected Christianity. He rejected Christ because he rejected Christians.

Gandhi was turned off by Christian hypocrisy. One time, after quoting from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Gandhi was asked why he was not a Christian. He responded, "I will become a Christian when I meet one." The missionary, E. Stanley Jones, once met with Gandhi and asked him, "Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?"

Gandhi replied, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ...If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today."

Gandhi is not alone. He had the same problem many people have today. If you ask most people why they don't go to church or why they don't become a Christian, or why they left the faith, one of the most common answers is a variation on this, "The church is full of hypocrites."

On one level, at least, the charge seems true. When Christians turn a faith of redemption and forgiveness into an excuse to hate others, they are hypocrites. When well-known Christian leaders urge you to give money to advance the cause of Christ, and then puts it in his own pocket, he is a hypocrite. When Christians judge the sins of others as worse than their own, they are hypocrites. You get the picture.

### **Is the Church Full of Hypocrites?**

A couple of responses to this. First, the charge of hypocrisy is not exclusive to the church. All sorts of groups are full of hypocrites. Democrats: a bunch of hypocrites. Republicans? Hypocrites there too. When I drive by a hospital and see a bunch of doctors and nurses outside taking a smoke break? Hypocrites. When an environmental activist flies a private plane that leaves a carbon footprint the size of a coal fired power plant to a summit to save the planet from fossil fuels: hypocrisy. I've known Muslims and Hindus who did things that were hypocritical to what they professed to believe.

Maybe this is where the atheist or agnostic jumps in and says, "That's why I reject all religions." But when prominent atheists claim that it is possible to be good and moral without God, then when these same atheists go out and behave in cruel, inhumane, abusive, and immoral ways, is this not hypocrisy?

What I'm saying is this: hypocrisy is a universal human condition. We all fail to measure up to our own standards, because all people are sinners. This is something Christianity neither hides nor denies. In fact, it is basic to the faith. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

This brings me to my second response to the charge that the church is full of hypocrites. The fact that the church is full of sinners isn't proof that it's full of hypocrites. A hypocrite is someone who does things he claims he does not do. People know Christians and see that they sin, and they say, "See, hypocrite."

If a person claims to be without sin, and then proceeds sin, then, yes, that person is a hypocrite, but simply to show that Christians sin does not automatically make them a hypocrite. The church is full of sinners. True. But we never claimed otherwise. How many of you here are a sinner? Oh, I am shocked. This church is full of sinners. But that doesn't mean it's full of hypocrites.

Yes, we are sinners. We admit. That's why we are here. The church is the only institution I know of that requires an admission of being a sinner in order to be a member. The church is filled with sinners because the church is the place where sinners who confess their sins come to find forgiveness and renewal from their sins. We're not here to pretend to be something we're not. We're here because we're screwed up and we know it. The Bible teaches that we've all screwed up, every last one of us, and we need someone who is not screwed up to fix us. Who better than the one who made us?

This brings us to the whole point of this morning's message. Christ is > Christians. Christianity is best judged based on who Jesus is, not on who Christians are. Christians are nothing but a messed up bunch of sinners. Yes, we are trying to get our lives straightened out. Jesus making us better than we were, but we're not there yet. It's all about Jesus and who He is.

Jesus is our Creator. He was there at creation. He was a part of the Us, when God said, *"Let us make mankind in our image."* The Apostle John declares in his gospel, *"Through him all things*

*were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”* He is the one who is not screwed up who came to fix all of us who are screwed up. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Jesus was deeply acquainted with hypocrisy. In fact, our word hypocrisy comes straight out of the ancient Greek language that Jesus spoke. A *hypokritēs* was an actor in a Greek drama. On stage these actors used masks to portray their characters. Even today, theater is symbolized by the twin masks of comedy and tragedy. In ancient plays, a *hypokritēs* would play multiple characters, so they would use multiple masks. This word came to be used for anyone who pretended to be something they were not. When it comes to Jesus and hypocrisy, we can say several things about Jesus.

### **1. Jesus Hates Hypocrisy**

First is that Jesus hates hypocrisy. He doesn't excuse it, tolerate it, or wink at it. He abhors it. From the beginning of his ministry to the end of it, Jesus fought against hypocrisy. In Matthew 6, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed the subject at length. He warns us not to do religious things just so that others will think of us a spiritual. Before you know it, you're just pretending to be spiritual when you really aren't.

Jesus says things like this in vs. 2, *“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypokritēs do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.”* In vs. 5, *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypokritēs for they love to pray standing the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”*

Then in Matthew 23, toward the end of his ministry Jesus goes on an absolutely rant against the religious elites, the Pharisees, who were supreme hypocrites. He calls them blind guides, a bunch of poisonous snakes, and whitewashed tombs. The outside looks pretty, but on the inside is nothing but rotting death.

Jesus hasn't changed. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” He still detests hypocrisy. He still denounces it. It still arouses his anger wherever it is found. Jesus hates hypocrisy even more than we do.

### **2. Jesus Experienced Hypocrisy.**

The second thing we can say when it comes to Jesus and hypocrisy is that he experienced it firsthand. He was a victim of hypocrisy. It was something that he endured throughout his life and even death. He knows what it is like; He understands the pain of it; He grieves with those of us who are hurt by it.

Also know that Jesus saw hypocrisy far more clearly than we ever do. He has an X-Ray vision

that Superman only wishes he had. Jesus could see into the hearts of people. He understands their deepest motives and desires. He saw the true intentions in every critic, in every attack, in every accusation.

Knowing that, we have to remember that when Jesus died on the cross, he also died for the sin of hypocrisy.

### **3. Jesus Predicted Hypocrisy**

Thirdly, Jesus predicted there would be hypocrisy. Our Savior knew that spiritual pretending wouldn't only be a problem in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Jesus was quite up front that there would never be a pure and perfect church in this world.

In Matthew 13 Jesus tells a parable about a farmer. We pick up the story in verse 24,

*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.*

The farmer's servants wanted to go out and immediately pull the weeds, but the farmer tells them, "No, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them."

Later on, Jesus' disciples come to him and ask Jesus to explain this story. Jesus is the farmer who sows the good seed. The field is the world. And the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. It's the church, and Jesus tells us that the bad seed will be mixed in with the good seed right up until the end of the age. And then Jesus himself will purify his church.

This brings up an important question – Why? Why did Jesus choose to do it this way? Why didn't he create a perfect and pure church from the beginning? Why allow all these weeds to be mixed into the kingdom. This brings us to number 4.

### **4. Jesus Uses Hypocrisy**

The answer is that Jesus can use it for our good. He uses trials such as these to test and prove our faith. If we hang on to Jesus despite all the pain that profession people inflict on us and others, my faith in Him must be genuine.

Hypocrisy in others can also motivate us to self-reflection and to examine our own words, actions, and motives. We see how others are blind to their faults, that should drive us to our knees and pray, "Lord, open my eyes. Show me where I am blind. Expose that which I try to keep hidden." This shouldn't discourage us. It should encourage us.

The very fact that I'm concerned I may be a weed, that I may be wearing a mask, is a sign that our faith is genuine. That I'm concerned that other people might be weeds and I want them to become wheat is another sign of spiritual life.

Jesus can use these experiences to magnify his grace. When we see that even the most mature

Christians still have large areas of hypocrisy in their lives, we marvel at what a gracious Savior He must be, to love and die for such messed up people.

### **5. Jesus Will End Hypocrisy**

So, hypocrisy has been a part of the church from the very beginning. It remains a reality in the church today. It will continue to be a part of the church until the very end. As long as sin is a part of us, hypocrisy will rear its ugly head as well.

But here's the end of the story – the time will come where Jesus will end all hypocrisy in the church. Jesus will gather up all the weeds out of his kingdom to be burned. Our struggle with sin will be over. He will end the pain and distress of the present messed up state of the church and we will live perfect and pure in his presence forever.

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes about how Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. He will cleanse us and make us holy so that one day, verse 27 says, *“he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”* A perfect world. A perfect church. A perfect you! It will be the most perfect joy you will ever experience.

## **II. Christ Centered Solutions**

But what are we supposed to do in the meantime? If hypocrisy is going to be a part of my life and your life, in some measure for the foreseeable future, how do we deal with it? What should be our response when brothers and sisters in Christ, disappoint us with their shortcomings, when they hurt us by using one tape measure for their lives, but a different one on us? What do we do when we hear of another Christian leader who misappropriated ministry funds, or engaged in sexual sin, or both?

### **1. Try to See Jesus Even in the Worst Christians.**

The first Christ-centered answer to hypocrisy is try to see Jesus even in the worst Christians. None of us are a finished product. God is not done working on you yet. You're still growing. The same is true of every person you will ever go to church with. Every follower of Jesus needs a tattoo on their head that says, “Pardon my mess. Under construction.” I'm a mess. You're a mess. That's why we have a mess-iah.

Every other Christian no matter how much of a mess they are, there is still a trace of the image of God in there somewhere. There is still some sign of God's working. Jesus is leaving his fingerprints somewhere. Look for that. Focus on that. Thank God for that. Encourage that.

### **2. Be Patient**

Secondly, be patient. Spiritual growth takes time. I remember years ago, when I was still a kid, I attended a Christian conference with my parents. They passed out these little buttons that said

PBPGINFWMY. It stood for Please Be Patient God Is Not Finished With Me Yet.

All too often we expect others to grow at a much more rapid pace that we expect of ourselves. Or we want them to catch up to us quickly. Jesus compared God's work in someone's life to a small lump of leaven that slowly, gradually, but inevitably works its way through a whole batch of dough. It takes time. We need to be patient.

### **3. Pray for Them.**

The third Christ-centered solution to hypocrisy is pray for them. When we're talking about someone, it is so easy for that talk to become negative. We've all done it. We've all ripped someone to shreds, often when they're not around to defend themselves. Guess who's being the hypocrite now? Hmmm.

When you start feeling that irresistible urge to start ripping and tearing at someone, talk about them in the most constructive way possible. Pray for them. I'm not talking about that Christian thing where we share gossip disguised as prayer.

"Dear Lord, I pray for Cheryl and I pray that you would help her overcome her bitter backstabbing ways. I pray that she would realize how hurtful she was when she said..." No. Genuinely pray for them. Yes, you can pray for spiritual growth and victory over sin, but thank God for the work He's already doing in their lives. Ask God to bless them.

Two things happen when we genuinely pray for someone like this. First, it's very hard to hate the person you're praying for. It's hard to pull them down when we're lifting them up in prayer.

The second thing is prayer works. Your prayer may very well affect change in them. Your prayer can bear fruit in their life. Now, prayer sometimes changes others, but prayer always changes you. You'll get a new perspective on both the person and the problem. You'll see things in them you didn't see before. You'll see new ways of approaching the situation. What you'll find is that weeds often become wheat.

### **4. Speak Positively About Other Christians.**

Number three. Speak positively about other Christians. We're not supposed to tear each other down. We're supposed to build each other up.

We've all done it. When you're in a group and someone starts tearing down a brother or sister in Christ, or you're tempted to start ripping into someone. Instead focus on a part of their life that does evidence God's work in them. Find some way the Holy Spirit is using them. Sure, there are still obvious remnants of the Devil's work, but why put the spotlight there?

This isn't just a practical suggestion. It's a command. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."* When a conversation starts to go negative, you spin it in the positive as quickly as you can.

Listen carefully here. I'm not saying we ignore sin or sweep problems under the rug. There are things that certainly have to be addressed, but we don't want the focus to be on what's wrong people. Rather we want the focus to be on what's right with Jesus.

### 5. See Your Own Faults in Them

Number Five. And this is where it gets personal. But this is also where real life change happens. See your own faults in them. It's amazing how we can be especially hard on people who have the same particular failings we have. Have you ever listened to one brother or sister in Christ rip into another, and you want to say, "Hello, pot, meet kettle?"

I think we do this because it helps us feel better about ourselves. If we can find someone who is even worse in some area than we are, then we must not be so bad. But this is where so many of the charges of hypocrisy come from.

Many of you ladies have something in your bathroom. I don't know why you do this to yourselves. It's called, I believe, a magnifying makeup mirror. It blows up everything to like 10 times its normal size. Even worse, they put like the ugliest color lights around these things, so that whatever blemishes it shows look 10 times worse. So, now that tiny little pimple is like the Kilauea Volcano. That little wrinkle looks like the Grand Canyon.

The couple of times I've looked into those things I'm thinking why do you do that to yourselves? Even the best part of my face looks like a lunar landscape. If I turned on the radio I'd hear "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

I want you to consider something that maybe you've never thought of before. What if God sent them into your life to act as a magnifying mirror to your own sins? What if God is trying to show you yourself through them? It doesn't make any sense to attack the mirror for what it shows on your own face. Use it to see what's wrong with you more clearly, and do something about it.

This is the one response to sin and hypocrisy that Jesus specifically teaches us. In Matthew 7, in the famous, "*Judge not, that you be not judged*" passage. People love to quote this verse, but they stop there. This verse has nothing to do with ignoring sin, or minding your own business. The bottom line is judge yourself first. Look in the mirror and make sure you're free from any sin before you point it out in someone else. Here's what Jesus says in Matthew 7:

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

They need to be a mirror so you can see your own sins more clearly. Sin in others needs to be a catalyst for personal growth and spiritual transformation. The best way to deal with hypocrites is to focus first on Jesus, then next on yourself, then finally on others.