

Tough Questions

Why Is the Church So Full of Hypocrites?

Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney, March 31, 2019

Songs – Your Love Defends Me | Yes, I Will | Bigger

W&A (Fannin + Stephen P?): Connect | Spring Conf | Grow in Grace OR Easter

Bumper Video –

Approach –

This past weekend Vicki and I were on flight home together from a conference that we'd attended together. And I know I've shared a lot of stories with you about the JOY I've had in sharing the Gospel with someone on a plane... BUT this time I was by the aisle... and my sweet wife was in the middle... by a woman seated next to the window.

And so THIS time I had the joy of PRAYING and listening to my wife share the GOOD NEWS of Jesus with the woman seated next to her. And the woman was very POLITE... and even SHOWED genuine interest... BUT at one point when Vicki paused she said...

- Can I ask you a question about the church?

And Vicki said, 'Sure.' And the woman said, 'My brother is not religious at all... and he's never gone to church... but he's the nicest guy you'd ever meet. And then I know people that DO go to church regularly... BUT they are so difficult and hard to be around.'

- Can you explain that?

And Vicki did a FINE job. BUT here's what I wanna ask you...

- Can you explain that? What would you say?

Transition –

You see... we're in a sermon series right now that I'm calling 'Tough Questions'... 'cause we're TRYING to think through some of the most COMMON objections to Christianity... and this IS one of the biggest.

Social critic and Christian Apologist, **Os Guinness**, says that the problem of HYPOCRISY is SECOND only to the problem of suffering and evil as one of the MAIN reasons that people give for REJECTING Christianity and the CLAIMS of Christ.

So... let's DIG into it.

I. Make Sure You Know What a Hypocrite Really Is

Because in the words of the THEOLOGIAN, Inigo Montoya, in the movie 'Princess Bride,'... "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

He's talking about the word... 'INCONCEIVABLE'... I know. BUT I think this word 'Hypocrite gets abused far more.

So... let's take some time to DEFINE this thing before we use the WORD over and over in this message today.

And what can be HELPFUL in building a DEFINITION is to STATE clearly what something is NOT! A hypocrite is NOT a person who CLAIMS to be a Christian... but STILL sins. Folks! That's a normal Christian... including the Apostle Paul himself who said in...

Romans 7:15 "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

In other words... I keep on sinning and doing some of the very things that I now hate. But now... here's what DOES define a Christian. He says he HATES it. He no longer LOVES his sin... because he has NEW desires. Notice... he says "I do not do what I want."

He has a new WANT or desire to PLEASE and follow Jesus... BUT he still sins. That new DESIRE doesn't always translate into new BEHAVIOR as often as he wished it did.

So... hypocrisy is NOT the GAP between what we WANT to do... and what we're ACTUALLY doing. Hypocrisy is a COVER-UP... where we try to PRETEND that there is no gap!

- And what is the heart CONDITION that FUELS that kind of cover-up?

Pride. You see... hypocrisy is FILLED with pride and FOCUSED on externals... that always leads to LEGALISM... not Christianity. Both can LOOK similar at points... but when you get CLOSE to them they SMELL very different. Hypocrisy wreaks of pride and self-righteousness... while Christianity should have the sweet AROMA of the knowledge of Christ about it.

So let's get something straight: The DEFINITION of a hypocrite is NOT a Christian who still sins... BUT a person who tries to COVER up their sin... and PRETEND that it doesn't exist.

The apostle Paul wrote 12 books of the New Testament... called himself 'the CHIEF of sinners... and vehemently DENOUNCED hypocrisy... because being a SINNER and being a HYPOCRITE are not the same thing.

When it comes to being a SINNER... Paul said 'Call me the Chief of Sinners'... BUT he never said, 'Call me a HYPOCRITE... because I'm probably the BIGGEST hypocrite you know!' Uh uh.

So... some of what we're BUMPING up against is how the world has CONFLATED and CONFUSED the word 'Sinner' and 'Hypocrite.' To CONFLATE something is to MERGE two things into ONE... as if they are the same. Sinner and hypocrite are not SYNONYMOUS.

Oh, Christians are STILL sinners. The Bible teaches that clearly. But we should NOT be hypocrites who try to cover it up... and pretend that we're better than we are. Instead we should OWN it... and ASK for forgiveness... and SAY to anyone who points it out, 'That's why I need a Savior. And, so do you.'

You see...

A. A Lot of Hypocrites are Just People Trying to Look Religious Instead of Loving Jesus

And there is a BIG difference between LOOKING religious and LOVING Jesus! In many cases... the people being called HYPOCRITES are not even Christians. They're RELIGIOUS... but they don't have a RELATIONSHIP with Jesus Christ... because that all STARTS with owning up to the fact that you're a SINNER in desperate need of a SAVIOR.

You see... hypocrisy... legalism... and religious externals ALL run in a pack together... 'cause they're ALL DEVOID of humility... any understanding of grace... and therefore any power beyond your own limited resources and efforts.

Religious hypocrites are who Paul was talking about in...

2 Timothy 3:5, 7 ^{v. 5} Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people... ^{v. 7} always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth."

Jesus Himself spoke some of the most SOBERING words in the Sermon on the Mount when He said in...

Matthew 7:22-23 ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

But lemme show you something else that is WHY I think we so often hear this CRITICISM that the church is FILLED with hypocrites.

B. What Looks Like Hypocrisy Is Often Just the Reality of Christians Who are Still in the Process of Changing and Growing

You see... as Christians... we have NEW DESIRES but we STILL have this BODY of sin that WARS against those new desires. **Romans ch. 7** that I already quoted from is Paul's personal testimony... but he also talks about it in Galatians 5... when he says...

Galatians 5:17 *New Living* "The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions."

In other words... because the Spirit of God LIVES in us Christians have new DESIRES but that will not AUTOMATICALLY translate into consistent or perfect behavior in alignment with those desires.

That's WHY Colossians 3 says...

Colossians 3:12 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

That's WHY Ephesians 4 says...

Ephesians 4:22-24 ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

It will NOT be automatic. You have to PUT it on... like choosing a certain kind of shirt from your closet. Otherwise... you could keep on wearing the same NASTY T-shirt of SELFISHNESS you were wearing before you came to Christ.

But now... here's what we need to get a hold of... and it's my SECOND main point. Whether you're a Christian or NOT... we need to all...

II. Be Willing to Admit that We're All Guilty of Hypocrisy to Some Degree

I know we LIVE in a day that LOVES to talk about transparency... and authenticity... and everybody wants everybody else to be REAL. BUT could we just stop and ACKNOWLEDGE for a minute that while we want everyone AROUND us to be authentic... and transparent... and real... we ACTUALLY find it hard to CONSISTENTLY do so ourselves.

You say...

- Brad, what are you talking about???

I'm talking about the EFFECTS of sin in each of our lives... that CAUSES each of us to feel SHAME and want to HIDE from God and other people. That's what Adam and Eve did as soon as sin became a REALITY. They HID from God... and they felt SHAME in front of each other.

And that CONDITION has been PASSED on to us... SO that because of the sin we're BORN with we are TERRIFIED of the very things that we want to SEE in others around us. All of us struggle with the temptation of PRETENDING and PROJECTING an image of who we'd like to BE instead of who we ARE.

So... let's just admit that hypocrisy HAPPENS wherever people are GATHERED together – whether it's a WORKPLACE... or NEIGHBORHOOD... or CHURCH. It just so happens that the church is where it seems most OFFENSIVE.

And rightly so... because Christians of all people have the CAPACITY – a SUPERNATURAL capacity to WALK in light... BUT it will not be automatic. It'll have to be a CHOICE.

But lemme get to POINT #3... 'cause it's the MOST important thing we'll talk about today.

III. Don't Let the Problem of Hypocrisy Keep You from Examining Christianity and the Person of Jesus Christ

And here's WHY. Because...

A. Every Christian is Not a Hypocrite

Oh, listen to me! While every Christian has STEPPED into hypocrisy at some point in their life... it is NOT true that we could CHARACTERIZE every Christian who's EVER lived as TOTAL hypocrite!

The history of Christianity is filled with EXAMPLES of Christians who have sacrificially GIVEN themselves for others... and have in many WAYS lived like their Savior – Jesus!

Oh, don't HEAR me saying there aren't HYPOCRITES in the church... and that it's NOT a problem. BUT DO hear me saying it's NOT problem that should cause you to TURN away from Jesus or REFUSE to examine the CLAIMS of Christianity.

Hey! It's Springtime... so some of you are getting READY to have a great GARDEN, right? And you're probably gonna work real HARD at it.

- But do you think there'll BE some WEEDS in that garden?

I bet there will be.

You SAY... Brad, what's your point?

Here's my point. IF I have WEEDS in my garden, I have a PROBLEM... but it doesn't CAUSE me to question the EXISTENCE of REAL tomatoes... and onions... and lettuce... and cucumbers. Oh, no!

Oh, listen to me!

- Does the presence of HYPOCRITES or counterfeits NULLIFY the fact that there are GENUINE Christians?
- Remember the movie 'Catch Me If You Can'... starring Leonardo DiCaprio?

IF you saw the movie then you know it was BASED on the true-life story of a man who, before his 19th birthday, has POSED as an airline PILOT... a medical DOCTOR... and an ATTORNEY.

- Does the FACT that he was a FRAUD mean that there are no certified pilots in the airline industry?
- Does that mean that every PHYSICIAN is a quack?
- And does that mean that every ATTORNEY is simply a shyster... out to take your money?
- If I showed you a counterfeit \$50 bill... does that mean you'd turn down the one your grandfather gives you in your Christmas card?
- Does the fact that Picasso prints are available NULLIFY the existence of the originals?
- Does the fact that you can buy a CHEAP cubic zirconium ring NULLIFY the existence of genuine DIAMONDS?
- And does the fact that a few CROOKED COPS exist going to keep you from calling 9-1-1 when someone is breaking into your house?

Listen to me! Jesus Himself GAVE the illustration of wheat and tares in regards to the church. In other words... there will ALWAYS be some MIXTURE of the real deal – WHEAT... and some WEEDS. And He said God will SORT it all out in the end... where He'll SEPARATE the wheat from the tares.

But lemme give you another REASON to NOT let hypocrisy keep you from EXAMINING Jesus Christ. See...

B. If You Hate Hypocrisy You and Jesus Already Agree on Something

That's right! IF hypocrites make you ANGRY... then you and Jesus are on the same page. You might NOT agree with what Jesus SAYS about your sexuality... your money... or your mouth... BUT if you HATE hypocrisy... you and Jesus have something in common.

In fact... the word 'Hypocrisy' or variations of it APPEAR 17x in the NIV translation of the Bible... with most of them coming out of Jesus' MOUTH in the Gospels. Nothing got Jesus more RILED up than hypocrisy!

He consistently showed COMPASSION to every level of sinner – from robbers... to prostitutes... to murderers... and to those caught in the very act of adultery... BUT He got right UP in the face of HYPOCRITES... and UNLEASHED some of His strongest DENUNCIATIONS.

Matthew ch. 23 is a FIERY passage that's FILLED with anger... as Jesus UNLEASHES a string of 'WOES' against self-righteous... religious... hypocrites. **6x** He says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

And **v. 27** and **28** CAPTURE the heart of what He's so UPSET about when He says...

Matthew 23:27-28 ²⁷ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Oh, listen to me! The ULTIMATE issue about Christianity is the person and work of Jesus Christ. And so the most IMPORTANT question to ask is...

- Was Jesus a hypocrite?

And the ANSWER from the Scriptures and from HISTORY is that...

C. Jesus Was Not a Hypocrite and Is the Only Perfect Example You'll Ever Find

As Jesus STOOD on trial... before His CRUCIFIXION on the cross He actually CHALLENGED His accusers by BOLDLY asking them in...

John 8:46 "Which of you can truthfully accuse Me of sin?"

And Jesus could GIVE this challenge because He ALONE was free from sin! In fact... later in his trial Matthew records that...

Matthew 26:59-60 ⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ⁶⁰ But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward..."

The enemies of Jesus had to MANUFACTURE false charges to get him out of the way.

- Why?

Because He was NOT a hypocrite... and was the ONLY perfect man that ever lived.

Christianity does NOT stand or fall on the WAY Christians have ACTED throughout history... or are ACTING today. Christianity STANDS or falls on the PERSON of Jesus... who lived CONSISTENTLY with everything He taught... and then GAVE His life in place of those who do NOT!

Christianity presents a PERFECT Christ for IMPERFECT people.

He LOVED the truth. He LIVED the truth. And He IS the truth.

Conclusion –

And so... I have a QUESTION for you IF you're here today... and you'd SAY "One of my REASONS for REJECTING Jesus and Christianity has always BECAUSE of all the hypocrites in the church."

IF that's you... lemme ask you...

- Is that REALLY the reason... or is that just an EXCUSE?

You see... IF you were HONEST I think you'd have to ADMIT that more often than not it's an EXCUSE more than a genuine reason... 'cause I think A LOT of people wanna use THAT excuse as a DEFENSE mechanism that PROTECTS them from having to DEAL with the real issue...

Which is NOT WHO Christians are and WHAT they're doing... BUT WHO Jesus is and WHAT He has DONE that you could never do for yourself.

You see... Jesus is the ONLY One who could ever RESCUE us from HYPOCRISY... and also RESCUE us from the dead-end of RELIGION... that is COMPRISED of outward... external... list-keeping... and rules... and comparison with others... that is all FOCUSED on the surface and has NOTHING to do with a genuine HEART change when you BOW the knee to Jesus Christ and completely SURRENDER your life to Him!

Turn with me to **Romans ch. 10**... and look at the SHOCKING contrast between outward religion... that is focused on what we're trying to DO for God... and genuine salvation that only comes by FAITH in what He's already DONE for us in His Son.

You follow along as I begin reading in **Romans ch. 10... v. 1**

[Read Romans 10:1-13 *ESV*]

Prayer –

Closing Song – Nailed to the Cross