

...because Christians Are Hypocrites

Good to see you guys this morning. My name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here at City Church. If I haven't had a chance to meet you yet, I would love to do that today. If you've got a bible with you, go ahead and turn with me to Luke 12. If you haven't been with us until today, we've been spending the past six weeks working our way through some of the most common objections that people tend to have to faith in Jesus. So in this series, we've covered things like the objections people have to the authority of the bible, the objections people have to the reality of evil and suffering in our world, and last week, the objections people have to the intolerance of Christians towards people of other lifestyles and belief systems. So if you missed any of those weeks and those are the types of questions you, or people you know wrestle with, feel free to go back and give them a listen online.

But the past two weeks specifically, we've moved on to addressing some of the objections people have to the behavior of Christians themselves. For some people, the decision between belief and unbelief isn't so much about intellectual problems they have with faith in Jesus—but rather about things they've seen Christians *do*, or *not* do, or *do* poorly. So we've been spending some time talking about those things specifically. And today is one of those: we're going to talk today about the problem that many people have with the hypocrisy and hypocritical actions of Christians in the world. Something nice and light to round out this series.

And I'll just go ahead and be real with you guys: there are copious amounts of examples of that kind of hypocrisy out there. Many of us who grew up in church could probably name first-hand evidence we have seen of Christians not being who they claim to be. Times where it got found out that a pastor or a deacon or an upstanding member of your church was discovered to have cheated on their spouse, or embezzled money from the church. All these leaders in the church that have secret lives going on behind the scenes that they hide from everyone around them until they get found out. That's *hypocrisy*, plain and simple.

Another example of this currently is an Instagram account (that I won't give you the name of right now, because you'll spend the rest of the time on Insta rather than listening). This Instagram account literally just documents example after example of prominent pastors wearing outfits and shoes costing thousands of dollars. So here you have pastors who talk about leveraging your entire lives and wallets for the kingdom of God, while they purchase clothing that they have no business wearing. Ample hypocrisy

to be seen there. Basically, each post is a picture of the pastor, then it zooms in on every item of clothing and details out how many hundreds, or sometimes thousands, of dollars each item costs. so don't worry, I went ahead and took the liberty of doing this for you for today:

And you even see it at times *outside* the church. Hardly a year goes by where we don't find out that some self-proclaiming Christian politician who considers himself a member of the "moral majority" is caught in something very contrary to what they claim to stand for: whether it be an extra-marital affair, or a sexual assault, or attempts at random hook-ups in airport bathrooms.¹ **If you're wanting to find hypocrisy among self-proclaimed Christians, you truly do not have to look very far at all.**

And that's a problem to the watching world. Because it feels like with every occurrence of Christian hypocrisy, the name of Jesus gets drug through the mud. Every time the world sees an example of the secret, hidden sin of a follower of Jesus coming to the light, they become at least a little less inclined to respect any sort of faith in Jesus. This type of hypocrisy seems to validate what a lot of people already *believe* about Christianity—that it's little more than a hobby. That Christianity is just a facade: and that people just become Christians because they want to feel better about themselves, or want to win an election, or just want to ensure eternal fire insurance.

Now whenever I hear people make this accusation about Christians—that Christians are hypocrites—I tend to respond with two things. And I want to walk you through what and why those are.

Response #1: "You're absolutely right."

My first response to people accusing followers of Jesus of hypocrisy is to affirm that they really are onto something. They're absolutely right. And not just about the examples of it that make headlines and make their way onto the evening news. Those are obvious. But the truth is that it's actually way worse than that. I would go so far as to say that nearly every Christian I've ever met is a hypocrite in some way. And that includes me. I, Eric Freemon, am a hypocrite. On a semi-regular basis, actually. So when people say that Christians are hypocrites, I have no reason to cast doubt on that conclusion.

I'll give you just a couple quick examples from my own life. There have been plenty of times when I've told my wife Sara that she couldn't buy something that she wanted

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/08/27/craig.arrest/>

because there wasn't room in the budget for it, then almost immediately after that I somehow justify going out to eat with a buddy and grabbing some drinks and I end up spending just as much, if not more, money than I just said we didn't have.

On a more serious note, I try to encourage my wife to share things she's feeling or experiencing or going through with me and remind her that it's positive and healthy and that growth happens in vulnerability. Then I end up going weeks or months without sharing the depth of what I'm thinking and feeling because I don't want to burden her or I don't want to appear weak or be too vulnerable, which is the exact thing I was trying to call her to. And plenty of times I'll end up reaching a point where I'll have a blow up because of all these things I've been feeling that I've kept bottled up suddenly surfacing at the same time.

And not only are people right in that *assessment*, they're also right in thinking that it is *not okay*. Jesus *also* regularly insisted that hypocrisy is not an acceptable way to live life. For instance, let's take a look at our passage in Luke 12. We'll read the whole passage at once, and then we'll reference back to it as we work through the teaching. Starting in v. 1, it says this:

*[1] In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**" [2] Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. [3] Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.*

Now, right off the bat, notice how Jesus depicts hypocrisy in this passage. He describes hypocrisy as "leaven." Most people in this culture actually ate *unleavened* bread. And if the slightest bit of leaven—or acidified old bread—touched the dough, it would ruin the unleavened bread. All it took was the slightest bit of *leaven*, for it to work its way through the entire lump of dough. So not only does Jesus think hypocrisy is *wrong*—he thinks it's *dangerous*. Jesus says that hypocrisy works like a cancer that spreads rapidly if it isn't guarded against properly. That's strong language for hypocrisy.

As for the word *hypocrite*, that word didn't always have the connotation it does now. Originally, it was just the word for an *actor* in the local theater. These actors would often wear different masks for their different characters, so that the same actor could play multiple parts. So being a "hypocrite" just meant you were "playing a part." It wasn't until

Jesus came along, we think, that the word came to mean what it means today: someone who, *in everyday life*, pretends to be someone they aren't. Jesus took the term hypocrite and said "yeah, you're like an actor in a theater—except you're like that in everyday life." Point being, Jesus was not okay with the hypocrisy he saw in the religious leaders of his day. Not at all, in fact, he rails against it on a semi-regular basis. Here's just a few examples throughout the book of Matthew:

*Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the **hypocrites** do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

*You **hypocrites!** Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*

*"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.*

And, personally, my favorite light-hearted, jovial reference:

*He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the **hypocrites**, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

And that's just a sampling. There are far more examples in the bible of precisely how *not okay* Jesus is with hypocrisy. So all of this to say, if you are frustrated and disgusted with hypocrisy, you should probably know that Jesus is too. He also has a strong distaste for people who pretend to be someone they aren't. And he's *especially* frustrated by the hypocrisy of those who claim to *know God*. Which is why he offers *warnings* like the one we just read. So to those frustrated by the hypocrisy of self-proclaimed Christians out there, I say, "you're absolutely right, and Jesus is with you on that."

But if I could, I *would* add one clarification: some people think that any time they see a Christian fail or sin or mess up, that's an example of hypocrisy. The thinking is that Christians are claiming to be morally pristine, and so if there are any examples of them *not* being that, that's hypocritical. But there might be a misunderstanding there. To be a Christian isn't to claim moral perfection or even moral *superiority*. To be a Christian is simply to claim that you are a follower of Jesus. Meaning that sure, the goal of your life is to become more and more like Jesus. But you're not claiming that you're there *already*. In fact, you're claiming that you're *not* there yet, and that's why you continually need the

grace of Jesus: because of how imperfectly you follow him. So I don't know that any old example of a Christian doing something wrong is an example of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy has to do with whether you're trying to *conceal* what you did from other people, or trying to pretend you *didn't* do something wrong. Does that make sense? So while there are plenty of examples of Christian hypocrisy out there, that doesn't mean that every time a Christian messes up, that makes them a hypocrite. But I see why people think that's what it means. Because sometimes Christians communicate that by their actions, we perpetuate it by saying things like, "don't air your dirty laundry," or, "don't ruin your witness," or people saying things like, "I just shouldn't struggle with this anymore." All of these, at least to me, seem like different ways of saying "we don't need Jesus to keep working in us. We need people to think we're perfect."

But that doesn't take away from the fact that people are spot on when they say that Christians at times are hypocrites. I think that's absolutely true. But here's the not-as-fun part to acknowledge. Response #2...

Response #2: "We are *all* hypocrites."

Here's the unfortunate reality: it's not just *Christians* that are hypocrites. It's actually all of us. It's *every single person on planet Earth*. Here's what I mean: every single one of us have things about our lives that are at odds with how we *say* life should be lived. Every single person acts in ways that are inconsistent with things they believe. Every single one of us have a gap between who we *say* we are, and who we *truly* are. So hypocrisy is not just a Christianity problem, it's a humanity problem.

A pastor from years ago tried to prove it to people like this. He told people to imagine that they had to wear a tape recorder around their neck at all times as they went about day-to-day life. Then he tells people to just imagine that it records every time you say things like "everybody should _____." Or, "I would never do _____." Or, "I'm the type of person who always _____." Anytime you make a moral statement about things that people should or shouldn't do, it logs what you say. And then he tells people to imagine that, at the end of our lives, all God does is read out those moral statements, and judges us based on how well or how poorly we lived up to our *own* moral standards." How do you guys think you'd fare? I don't know about you, but I would fail that test *miserably*. I *all the time* will *insist on* moral standards that I've failed to live up to, even *that same day*.

Or even if you think you'd do alright on *that*, how about your *thought life*? If right now, we could hook up this projector to a feed of the *thoughts* you've had and harbored this past week, would you stay in the room to see it? Would you stay in the room to see *other people's* reactions to it? If every bitter thought, every lustful thought, every selfish thought—if *all* of that—was broadcast on this screen for everyone to see, would you be cool with it? So what we're saying is that all of us have things about our lives that we'd rather stay hidden. We're saying that all of us have things in our life that are inconsistent with what *should be*—even by our *own* standards. What we're saying is that **Christian or not, believer or not, we're all actually hypocrites.** (Welcome to City Church, we're just here to encourage you today.)

But one question we *should* be asking is *why*? *Why* are we hypocritical? Why do we *all* do this? Why do we *conceal* certain things that we do or think? Because if our society truly believed what we *say* we believe—that “every person just has to figure out what is right and wrong for themselves”—none of us should be hiding *anything*. Right? Like why would you need to conceal *anything* that you do? You're just doing what's right for you—there's no reason to pretend you *didn't* do it. But yet, for some strange reason, we can't manage to stop *concealing* parts of who we are. We can't manage to just live our lives out in the open, no matter how religious or *irreligious* we might be. So why is that?

Well, here's how the book of Romans answers it:

Indeed, when Gentiles [“Gentiles” here is Paul's language for “those who do not know God.” When *Gentiles*], *who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.*

So here's what that passage just said: **even people who don't believe in God or claim to follow Jesus have some sense of morality.** We all have some type of construct in our minds for what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what things are okay to do and which things aren't. We all have this inherent north star in us that guides the things we do and don't say, do and don't do. And Scripture would say that the reason we have that in us is because *all of us* are made in the image of God. We all were designed by God to live a certain way, and so even if we don't always follow it or live up to it, we still can't seem to rid it from our system. In Paul's language, we “show that the requirements of the law are written on our hearts.” When our consciences

whisper to us “...this is good,” or “...this is bad,” what that very well may be, is the echoes of God’s image in us.

And so deep down, we have these moments where we know we did something wrong. We have these moments where we realize we did something that wasn’t okay. Where we weren’t who we were supposed to be. Where we feel inadequate in some shape, form or fashion. And outside of Jesus, the way we respond to those feelings of inadequacy is to try and cover them up. That’s where hypocrisy comes from: the desire to conceal the parts of us that we feel like don’t measure up.

But Jesus warns us that nothing stays concealed forever. According to v. 2-3 of our passage:

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

In other words, everything will *eventually* see the light of day—the good, bad and the ugly. “Don’t buy into the lie,” Jesus says, “that your hypocrisy can be kept up forever. Because there’s actually an expiration date on it.” Now, I don’t know how that makes you feel. It makes *me* feel a little *uncomfortable*. Because I do my best to live an open, transparent life. But at the same time, there’s no doubt that there are things about me and my life and my thoughts that I’d rather people not know. There are things that I’d just assume you not know I do or think or say. And my *guess* is that most of us probably feel the same way about at least certain *aspects* of our life. But as we said earlier, Jesus is not content to leave hypocrisy as it is. He’s not just going to turn a blind eye to it. He—like us—wants transparency. And so he promises us that, one way or another, that will happen to each and every one of us.

And while that might not *sound* like good news to us, it *is* good news. And here’s why: because hypocrisy is *exhausting*. Among everybody in this room right now, whatever our perspective is, here’s one thing I know is true of all of us who try to keep up appearances: we are exhausted from it. You are exhausted from trying to manage everyone’s perception of you. You are exhausted from trying to keep certain parts of you under wraps. You are exhausted from perpetually pretending to be somebody you’re not. And Jesus would say that’s because this isn’t how you’re designed to live. You weren’t designed to live in the dark, but rather in the light. And so Jesus says one way or another, those things will be brought into the light.

Now, I say “one way or another,” because God lets us *choose how* it will happen. One way it can happen is that God can bring it to the light. That’s what he’s getting at in Luke 12. One day, at the end of our life, Jesus says we will all discover just how unsuccessful we were at hiding all the things we were hiding. That will happen. But we don’t have to wait until then. We don’t have to live in fear until that day comes. There’s another option.

For what it is, let’s take a look at 1 John 1 (we’ll put it on the screen). Here in 1 John, the author unpacks the alternative to hypocrisy. If you want out of hypocrisy, there’s truthfully only one way out this side of the new heavens and new earth. And John is going to tell us exactly what it is, starting in v. 5:

[5] This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

So v. 5 is John driving home the exact same point that Jesus did in Luke 12: God is not okay with darkness. He’s not okay with hypocrisy. He’s not content with us hiding parts of who we are from him and everybody else. Because he is “light,” and in him is “no darkness at all.” Next, he’s going to work out the implication of that idea, v. 6:

[6] If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

So if we claim to have fellowship with God (i.e. we claim to know and follow Jesus), while we walk in the darkness—while we keep parts of us hidden and covered up—what does John say that makes us? He says it makes us a *liar*. That means we’re *lying*. Because in God is no darkness at all. But here’s the other beautiful, glorious option, v. 7:

[7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

The solution presented to us is that we can bring our sin to the light. We don’t have to wait for it to happen *to* us. We can do it ourselves. We can acknowledge the darkest parts of us that we don’t want people to find out, and bring all of that into the light where it can be known now. Right after this verse, John clarifies that what he’s talking about is what followers of Jesus call *confession*: the act of bringing our sin to the light voluntarily,

both with God and with others.² And if you really pay attention to this, you'll start to see that confession is actually the most practical way to fight against hypocrisy. Every time you confess, you are forcing yourself to remember that your righteousness comes from Jesus, not from any of your own efforts or accomplishments.

Now I know what you're thinking: *what on earth would make a person want to do something horrible like that? Why would I ever volunteer the darkest parts of me to God, much less to a third party?* I really feel like this is one of the most tangible and beautiful pictures of the gospel at work. I think it so clearly illustrates the beautiful exchange between us and Jesus. On the cross, Jesus took the darkest parts of us, across the whole spectrum of time, on himself so that we could stand before God the Father in the light. And every time we practice confession with other believers, we get to remember the beauty of that exchange and actively participate in it with other followers of Jesus. But I think I've seen a couple different push backs when it comes to confession with other believers. On one side, I've heard people say things like, "I don't know, confession and repentance just doesn't feel like I'm being fully authentic. This is who I am right now and I don't want to act like I'm something I'm not." But on the other side, I've heard plenty of people say, "that just feels too introspective and self-focused. Besides, I've already talked to God about it and I feel like our time would be better spent just doing some intensive bible studies." Or maybe you're thinking "there's just nothing on this planet that could make me do that." But for followers of Jesus, it's really not that anybody *makes us*—it's that we *desire* to. We desire to because we know it's the only way to change. The first step to solving any problem is...*what? Admitting that there is one.* That's confession. If you're using a map or a GPS, what's the first thing you always have to do to find out where to go? *You have to figure out where you currently are.* That's confession. If there's no honesty about where you currently are, there is no way to grow. But if you can admit where you're at, then you can figure out where you're headed. You can grow, you can mature in Jesus.

And most importantly, it's not that anybody *makes us* confess—it's that God lets us. In light of what Jesus has done for us, we *get to* confess the deepest parts of us. It's right there in the passage: "if we confess our sins...the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin." We get to confess because Jesus made it possible for us to. Through Jesus' death on the cross, we are no longer defined by how many things we do wrong, or *right*, for that matter. Rather, we are defined by his sacrifice on our behalf. And when we entrust ourselves to that reality, his blood immediately purifies us from all our sin." The reason

² James 5:16.

we don't want to come to the light about our failures is because we often think we're *defined* by them. The death and resurrection of Jesus screams out that that's not true at all. You are defined by him—not by your sin. The good news of Jesus gets us to a point where, instead of constantly needing to assert the best parts of us and cover up the worst parts, we all just get to constantly point to the goodness and grace of Jesus.

Confession is the most practical way to fight hypocrisy because every time you confess, you are forcing yourself to remember that your righteousness comes from Jesus.

And as a result, when we confess, something else happens. In the passage, it says we also have “fellowship with *one another*.” Do you see that? No doubt in my mind that many of us currently feel incredibly lonely and isolated—even though we have friends all around us—because no one around us knows the real us. We've never shown them or let them see the real us. Simply put, we're lonely because we're hypocrites. So this strange thing happens when you confess your sin—and especially when you confess your sin to other people—where you realize how much you have in *common* with them. When confession happens amongst a group of people, everybody starts to realize: “huh. There kind of like me. Maybe we don't struggle with the *exact same thing*, but we're both struggling with what it looks like to follow Jesus faithfully. And turns out, I'm not the only one failing to do it well.” And so confession also has this uncanny ability to help us *build* community with one another.

But it also starves out our hypocrisy. Confession cuts out the fuel that hypocrisy needs to grow. And so the more we confess, the less hypocritical we will become. The less we confess, the more hypocritical we'll become. Confession is the only way to fight hypocrisy, and the good news of Jesus is the only thing that makes consistent confession possible. So it turns out, if we really want to do something about the problem people have with Christians' hypocrisy, all we need to do is take passages like 1 John seriously. We need to confess, and confess *often*. And this right here is one of the reasons being involved in a LifeGroup is something we are so passionate about. When we get to live life closely with followers of Jesus and get a window into each other's lives, one of the beautiful outflowings is the opportunity to regularly practice this kind of confession.

So let's just wrap up by asking a few diagnostic questions. If you're a follower of Jesus, I'd love it if you would just jot these down and ask yourselves these questions on a regular basis:

- **What aspect(s) of my life or thought life does nobody know about?** What are the things that you find yourself replaying over and over in your head and thinking, “I really hope no one finds out about this.” What are the things that you just sweep under the rug and pretend you’ll never see again, but in the back of your head, it will never go away.
- **What aspect(s) of my life or thought life am I only *partially* honest about?** What are the things that you’ve brought up by saying things like, “I’ve been dealing with lust,” but what you really mean is, “all I can think about is how I wish I was married to someone like her, or someone like him,” or, “I’m struggling day in and day out with sexual sin and I don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel.” Or maybe the things you’ve brought up like, “I’m having a hard time financially,” when in reality, every paycheck you get is functionally gone before you get it because you can’t stop buying stuff and you’re \$10,000 in debt because you can’t stop spending money selfishly on things you don’t actually need. As much as we don’t want to think about it, the truth is since we sin in specifics, we should be confessing in specifics.
- **What am I going to do about it?** In light of what Jesus accomplished on the cross in taking all of our deepest, darkest brokenness and sin on Himself so we can stand blameless before the Father, what do I do next? You see, the point of confession isn’t just confession, it’s repentance. The point isn’t just to talk about our shortcomings to check a box and feel better about ourselves, it’s to bring attention to the areas of our life where we need the saving power of Jesus to wash over us and change our hearts and invite other followers of Jesus to join us in our fight as we all strive to look more and more like Him because of what He accomplished on our behalf.

If you’re a follower of Jesus in the room, I pray that we can continue to join together in celebrating the work that was done on our behalf when we couldn’t bridge the gap created by our sin, and I pray that we can continue growing together in practicing confession because we know that it is Jesus who accomplished what we could not and we get to remember that and remind each other of that every time we bring our brokenness to light.