

WHY JOIN A CHURCH OF HYPOCRITES?, MATT 23:1-32

WHY? Questions for Christians #10

◆ **Intro:** A police officer pulled a driver aside and asked for his license and registration. "What's wrong, officer," the driver asked. "I didn't go through any red lights, and I certainly wasn't speeding."

◆ "No, you weren't," said the officer, "but I saw you waving your fist as you swerved around the lady driving in the left lane, and I further observed your flushed and angry face as you shouted at the driver of the Hummer who cut you off, and how you pounded your steering wheel when the traffic came to a stop near the bridge."

◆ "Is that a crime, officer?"

◆ "No, but when I saw the 'Jesus loves you and so do I' bumper sticker on the car, I figured this car had to be stolen."

◆ People can tell when we love and follow God, and when it's just a mask we wear. One of the challenges most often leveled against the Church is that it is full of hypocrites.

◆ A Bible study leader teaching moral purity who walks out on her husband and kids into the arms of another man.

◆ A priest who covers up the sexual abuse of children.

◆ A Bible-quoting businessman who chews out his employees like a drunken sailor.

◆ It's what the unbelieving world finds unbelievable! So how do we respond to this charge against our faith. I'm going to suggest a set of possible responses that you could use to start a

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conversation with your friends who raise the objection that the church is full of hypocrites.

◆ **Possible response #1: You know what, you and Jesus have something in common. You agree on the hypocrisy thing!** This is one way you could respond to your non-christian friends; by showing that they are actually on the same side as Christ himself! Jesus most harsh words were toward hypocrites. So they see eye to eye with Jesus on this. In fact, they may not realize it, but its likely that it's his teachings that lie behind their concern. You see, not all cultures condemn hypocrisy. Some actually honor it. But Christianity, which is responsible for much of Western Civilization, has condemned it from the start. That all came from Jesus himself.

◆ Five times in Matthew 23 Jesus calls the Pharisees of his day "hypocrites". He has some other **names** for them too: "sons of hell, whitewashed tombs, blind guides." How'd you like to go mountain climbing with a blind guide? He calls them out for not practicing what they preach (3). So our friends that object to hypocrisy are asserting a Christian virtue. What exactly is that virtue?

◆ **A. Jesus wants us to be authentic.** This is what hypocrisy is not. What is hypocrisy? Lets walk through the texts for an outlines:

◆ 1) **v5-7** Hypocrisy cares about the outside, the looks, but not the inside or substance. (also v25-28. It's ok with being

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a stinker on the inside as long as people don't think it or see it on the outside.) Back in the day, during prayer, they would tie little boxes (phylacteries) on their foreheads with bible verses inside like this one:

◆“This observance [the Feast of Unleaven Bread] will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand.” Exodus 13:9, NIV.

◆They had tassels on their robes which according to Numbers 15 was to remind them to obey God's commandments. So maybe it's like wearing a wristband that says "WWJD", or "God's Man", "I Love Jesus", or a big shiny cross around your neck, or a bumper sticker on your car. They liked to look the part! Thing is, God's commandments are about more than looking moral. They're about walking the talk, or at the very basis *wanting desperately* to walk the talk. Being authentic.

◆2) **v8-12** Hypocrisy is a pride thing; it's opposite is humility. To all but the most flagrant, pride is a sour term and repulsive. Jesus teaches us to kill it off.

◆3) **v13-15** Hypocrisy will cause a person to miss heaven and end up in hell! Why, because the externals are not the primary concern of God. It is the state of the repentant heart. This is one of the biggest misconceptions about

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Christianity! It is not a system of moral ethics. It is an acceptance of a forgiving relationship with God.

◆4) **v16-21** Hypocrisy wants to justify failure; there is a lot of excusing going on. This is what keeps you out of heaven. The opposite is to admit failure and repent of sin. This is the road into heaven. *Isn't this what so many of us do.*

Someone points out a flaw in us and we break into a heated, high-level, monologue about how we are not at fault and its everyone else, or all the reasons that our software, or our calendar, or our stress level explain we did not actually fail. The truly mature and authentic person holds his/her tongue and considers the correction, doubts the self and looks for his/her part in the argument.

◆5) **v22-24** Hypocrisy follows the letter of the law (the technicality) but not the spirit of the law.

◆If any of that disturbs you, you and Jesus have similar concerns! Jesus is all about that. Maybe there's even more about him that resonates with your unbelieving friend.

◆**Possible response #2. If you caught Einstein's kids shoplifting, would that make E=MC² untrue?** What this response is saying is that when you point at hypocrites, that's not Jesus. It could be his immature kids, or even a poser! Yes people bearing the name of Jesus have done some preposterous and violent things for which they need forgiveness. But they were not acting as Jesus told them to act in so doing. Many have

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gone to war using Christianity as their excuse, but they were not being Christian at all.

◆ In deciding if Christianity is true, it's the leader and his claims you need to consider most. Does E=MC2 or not? This response focuses on the truth claims of the Son of God first. Indeed he wants his followers to be like him, but their failure (ours) does not change the central tenants of the faith: That Jesus claimed divinity. That he died to take sinful man's punishment. That he came back to life a new kind of human and promised the same to his followers. That his resurrection has historical evidence on it's side, not to mention it's affect on world civilization.

◆ *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*
Hebrews 4:15, 16, NIV.

◆ Jesus lived the one, perfect and holy life; one without sin. No hypocrisy there! This is what qualifies him to pay for your and my sins! Yes there is hypocrisy out there, but that's not Jesus.

◆ Cf. That's Not Jesus -Wayne Watson

◆ **Possible Response #3: Yes there are hypocrites in the church,** [so you should feel right at home!] Careful, you might *feel* like saying this but it probably will not draw your neighbor in. Better to point out that **THAT'S WHY I FEEL RIGHT AT HOME.**

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◆ This response is not meant to be accepting of hypocrisy. It is meant to show that the church is a place for sinners and to vulnerably admit that we are one too, and we need help.

Hypocrisy is a universal problem because sin is a universal nature of everyone of us. There is no one who does not sin (Rom.3:23), yet no one wants other people to know all about their wrongs.

◆ *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." John 3:19, 20, NIV.*

◆ Can you relate to what Jesus said there? Of course you can. Is there anything about your life that you don't want me to know? If you know what guilt is, then you can understand how hypocrisy is possible even among the best because all of us are sinful.

◆ In discussing your Christian faith with your friends, it is helpful to openly admit your own need and duplicity. This leads to your expression of a grateful heart for the patience and forgiveness you keep receiving from God through Jesus. And that attitude is the opposite of the hypocrite who rubs us all the wrong way.

◆ **Possible Response #4: The Church is a hospital. We go there *because we know we're sick.*** This response is similar to the last one. It shouldn't be a surprise anyone that there are sinners in the church, anymore than that it isn't surprising to find more sick people at hospitals than healthy ones. Or that there

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are many cars that don't work at a mechanics shop. What the world needs to understand (and a lot of people who call themselves Christian need to understand) is that Christianity isn't a gospel of self-improvement, or moral accomplishment. It's the story of forgiveness for bad people who cannot save themselves.

◆ Now while it is true that moral perfection is not a possibility for mankind this side of heaven, it is also true that Jesus gives us a new self, on top of that old sinful one. We now have the possibility of growing holiness, but also the ability to forsake it. So we have a very real dichotomy. Jesus said his Spirit would come and make it's home in us and teach us his ways. He also told us not to put out the Spirit's fire!

◆ That means that the process has begun! But, make sure you tell all your friends that you are in process but have not arrived. True Christians will naturally progress in goodness over time. It's called sanctification. Adults ought to be expected to graduate from the bunny hill, or something is wrong. But bear in mind not only what you see in me or another, but where God has brought me from! You may very likely find much nicer people among the non-Christians than you see among the Christians. But as CS Lewis advises, you ought not rate him on a level of goodness compared to the best person you can find to determine if Christianity works, but you ought rate him on the difference it has made in him. You may not think I appear all that great a person,

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but then you should have known me before Christ got ahold of me!

◆ Secondly, judging Christianity as a whole by some hypocrites you find there is not a logical action. Will you burn the whole orchard because you find some rotten apples on the ground? Or, put it another way, if you found a witch doctor doing something evil, would you disparage the whole medical community? Of course not. The church is God's orchard. Yes there are some apples that refuse to ripen, but there are a lot of apples you are forgetting to count. And the church is a hospital. Yes there are ill patients there, but they are there in hopes of getting well!

◆ **Conclusion:** Because Christians are people who are trying to grow in godliness and are unhappy with even their own evil, people often make the assumption that we think we are better than others. Don't help people think that!

◆ *"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:16, NIV.*

◆ When you hear someone complain that the church is full of hypocrites, agree with them, and invite them to call you on it, if ever they see a similar thing. And take the opportunity to remind them that real Christians have never claimed to be any better than anyone else. We are just people who have been pardoned. If we improve in any goodness, the credit all goes to the grace of the Father.

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WAYNE WATSON: THAT'S NOT JESUS

I read the mornin' paper/ To my surprise and shame
Said a black eye of embarrassment/ Been attached to Jesus' name
Some mortal man convicted of some moldy moral sin
And the skeptics wage their tongues and say
"There goes that Jesus again"

The story graced the TV/ And the magazines too long
And if my heart ain't broken yet/ There must be somethin' wrong
Because but for the grace of God/ I know it could be me
And all that's left for me to do/ Is to help the world to see

That's not Jesus/ He doesn't carry on that way
Just some flesh and blood like you and me/ Somehow gone astray
That's not Jesus, no/ No matter what "they" say
He doesn't need me to defend Him/ He just wants me to obey

Have you seen the masterpiece Of Jesus on the cross
Well, if He's still a-hangin' there I'm hopeless--I am lost
I believe the tomb is empty And the stone's been rolled away
And because of all this trouble I still feel compelled to say

That's not Jesus...

And if your vision of Him/ Has gotten somehow blurred
By a stumbling soldier in the field
I'd like to say "I'm sorry"/ And remind you of one thing
One day all the Truth will be revealed

That's not Jesus...