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Overcoming Religious Hypocrisy

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“Church is not for me, it is full of hypocrites.” Have you ever felt that way? Apparently, you are not alone. More and more people are citing religious hypocrisy as a major reason why they do not go to church. Turned off by the inconsistency of their “Christian” neighbors and the bad news reports of “Christian” leaders, people are rejecting the gospel, even blaspheming God (**Rom. 2:21-24**).

Though it may seem that religious hypocrisy is worse than it has ever been, it has in fact been a serious problem for a very long time. Jesus gave this warning: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy” (**Luke 12:1b**). Repeatedly, the Pharisees and scribes were rebuked by Jesus for hypocrisy (**Mat. 23**). Jesus makes it clear that hypocrisy is an evil that if not repented of can cost a person their soul (**Mat. 24:45-51**). Jesus shares your disgust for religious hypocrisy!

Despite your disappointment, there is a way to overcome religious hypocrisy. *Not* by accepting the status quo and becoming a hypocrite yourself. *Not* by rejecting religion altogether and becoming irreligious. *Not* by rejecting organized religion or church in order to be “spiritual” (as some define spirituality). Religious hypocrisy can be overcome by our faith in what the true religion of Christ is supposed to be. “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (**James 1:27, NASB**).

Identifying the Problem of Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy may be defined in short as: “Pretending to be something you are not and/or concealing what you really are.” The word

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comes from the Greek word *hupokrisis*—“the acting of a stage player” (Thayer). Acting in order to entertain in theater, television, and movies is expected, yet to put on an act in religion is deceitful and dishonest. Hypocrites essentially do the devil’s work under the guise of religion. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also **disguise themselves as servants of righteousness**; whose end shall be according to their deeds” (**2 Cor. 11:13-15**).

Religious hypocrisy can be placed into three major problem areas: *Hypocritical devotion to the Lord* (**Mat. 7:21-23; 23:23**); *hypocritical worship of God* (**Mat. 6:5; Mark 7:6-8**); and *hypocritical judgment of others* (**Rom. 2:1-3**). Unfortunately, all three run rampant in religion today. Perhaps this explains, *in part*, why attendance to church is at an all time low in our society (only about 40% of Americans claim to attend church on a regular basis).

The Search for Genuine Christianity

Sincerity: Opposite of hypocrisy is sincerity; genuine Christians will have a *sincere* love for God and a *real* interest in doing what is right (**Phil. 1:9-11**). The reason why such Christians are hard to come by is that most people are just faking their way through it. They pretend to be religious and put on airs so as to appear devout, yet fail to give their hearts to God (**Mat. 23:25-28**). So when you find a group of Christians who sincerely want to follow Christ, it is a wonderful blessing indeed! “And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and **sincerity of heart**, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (**Acts 2:46-47**).

Substance: Genuine Christianity is of **substance**, not superficial. Genuine churches **of Christ** and authentic **Christians** are built upon “the Rock” (i.e. the words of Christ—**Luke 6:46-49**). Far too often, there is a phoniness among self-professed Christians - people “talking the talk, but not walking the walk” to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. How refreshing it is when you can be among brothers and sisters in Christ who take their

walk with Christ seriously! *“For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth”* (3 John 3-4).

Humble and Committed: You do not find genuine Christianity by finding a group of Christians who claim to be *perfectly* Christ-like in every way. In fact, a group that fails to be honest about their shortcomings is a warning sign of religious hypocrisy! (Luke 12:1-2). Genuine Christians are humble and honest about their mistakes *while at the same time* fully committed to serving Christ (e.g. 1 Tim. 1:12-16). While Christians give it their all, they also understand their need for grace along the way (1 John 1:8-10). With humility, they “walk in the light.”

Don’t let the hypocrisy of some send you on a never-ending search that leads to your downfall! Guard yourself against using the hypocrisy of some as an excuse not to take responsibility for your own commitment to Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Strive to see the good in those, though not perfect, are doing their best to live the life of Christians and resolve to walk with them in unity of the truth! (Eph. 4:1-3).

Examine Yourself for Religious Hypocrisy.

As much as we disdain hypocrisy in others, we need to take an honest look at ourselves (Mat. 7:1-5). Overcoming religious hypocrisy first begins by overcoming it in our own lives. Is the standard we hold for others in religious matters the standard that we hold for ourselves? Do we practice what we preach to others?

“Laying aside hypocrisy” is essential to our spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:1-3). The goal is to eliminate hypocrisy altogether. Yet, clearly this is not achieved overnight. It is an ongoing process as we mature in Christ. Recognizing this is essential not only for our own spiritual growth, but also for our attitude toward fellow Christians who are working to improve. Understanding the challenge of being consistent (Col. 3:17) instead of hypocritical is essential to overcoming religious hypocrisy in ourselves as well as helping others to overcome.

Sin Will ...

**Take you farther than you wanted to go,
Keep you longer than you wanted to stay.
Cost you more than wanted to pay!**