How Can I Believe in Christianity When I See So Much Christian Hypocrisy?

In this series, we are dealing with questions that both Christians and seekers alike often wrestle with, in regards to Christianity. One of the major issues that many encounter with Christianity is that of hypocrisy. How can we truly believe in Christianity when we see so much Christian hypocrisy?

Simply stated, a hypocrite is someone who says one thing and does another. Jesus addresses these people in Matthew 15.7–8: “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

R.C. Sproul defines it like this: “To preach at a higher level than you perform is not hypocrisy. To claim a higher level of performance than you have attained is hypocrisy.”

All of us have certain principles or values we would say are good ways to live, yet most of us would admit to not fully living them out. This does not make someone a hypocrite. A true hypocrite is someone who tries to give the impression that they are passionate about something that they don’t really care much about.

Question: Have you been guilty of this? When have you tried to seem like something different than what you really are?

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R.C. Sproul

So if hypocrisy is saying one thing but doing another, in order to identify Christian hypocrisy, we first need to know what Christians say. Two of the most fundamental beliefs Christians hold are:

- A) that we are inconceivably broken sinners in need of a Savior, and
- B) a person who puts their trust in Jesus will be increasingly made new from the inside-out.

From these statements we can make two conclusions.

First, in one sense, Christians are the least hypocritical people around. Christians don’t claim to be perfect. Instead, they claim to be so messed up that Jesus had to die for them. So when someone who says they’re messed up messes up, they’re not being hypocritical, they’re being honest.
Second, when it comes to figuring out if a Christian is a hypocrite, the question is not: “Do they live their life perfectly?” The Bible never commands or expects perfection from us on this side of eternity. Instead, the question is: “Is there transformation in their life?” The life of a Christian should reflect the kind of growth a relationship with Christ makes possible.

C.S. Lewis was once approached by a skeptic who asked: “If Christianity is true, then why do I see this Christian I work with getting so angry?” Lewis responded, “The question isn’t if the man still gets angry, but rather, is he less angry than he used to be?” The criteria for being a Christian isn’t perfection, it’s gospel-driven transformation. Once we understand that, we’ll begin to realize there aren’t nearly as many Christian hypocrites as we thought—just a lot of people on a journey of change.

And we shouldn’t be surprised that there are so many imperfect people in the church. The Bible says the church is a hospital for sinners, so where better for them to be?

**Question:** How have you seen the Church act as a hospital for sinners?

A Christian is someone who has acknowledged that they are a broken sinner and has put their whole life’s trust in Jesus as their Savior, Master, and King.

With all of this said, it still leaves the fundamental question, what do we do with people we see going to church, claiming to be Christians, but whose lives exhibit no transformation, ongoing growth or change whatsoever? This is not a new question and it’s one that Jesus even addressed.

› Read Matthew 7.20–23.

The reason we think we see so many hypocrites, is because we’re surrounded by people who aren’t really Christians but think that they are. People might hold Christian beliefs, do religions things, go to church, or even volunteer. But Jesus says that doing Christian things and having Christian beliefs don’t make you a Christian. A Christian is someone who has acknowledged that they are a broken sinner, and has put their whole life’s trust in Jesus as their Savior, Master, and King. And many people, even people in church, haven’t done that yet.

**Question:** Have you actually put your complete trust in Christ, or have you been playing religious games, trying to fool yourself and those around you? Can you identify areas of transformation in your life?

When it comes to issues of hypocrisy, the ultimate issue isn’t Christians: it’s Christ. The question we most need to ask is, was Christ a hypocrite? If He was, then it’s not worth following. But if He wasn’t, if He was everything He claimed to be, if He lived, died, and was raised to life so that we could find life through Him, then we should commit our lives fully to Jesus and to His family, the church.

Someday we’re going to stand before God and He’s going to hold us accountable for the only life we are accountable for—our own. On that day we won’t be able to put off God with our speculations about other people’s faith because the only faith that will matter will be our own.

We can’t let the hypocrisy of other people get in the way of our spiritual destiny. Jesus wasn’t a hypocrite. He made some bold claims, but backed every one of them up with His life. In fact, the boldest claim He made was that He was going to get crucified and then be raised to life three days later. And He was!

**Question:** Has Christian hypocrisy been a stumbling block in your spiritual journey? How does focusing on Jesus change your perspective?

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