

“From One Hypocrite to Another”

1 Corinthians 13

Series: Wrestling with God Week 7: Why are Christians Such Hypocrites?

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Life Church Pastor and author Craig Groeschel shared this story with his congregation one Sunday. On my way to work last week, I carefully pulled out onto a busy highway. I quickly realized I misjudged how fast the upcoming car was coming because the car had to break and slow down. No one hurt; my fault. Clearly not feeling charitable, the other driver expressed his displeasure by blaring on his horn, speeding up faster and riding my bumper. As I am a pastor — person of God, I acknowledged my mistake humbly with the international sign of apology - Head down, hand up — my bad. Sorry bro, I misjudged it. Not going to bring up the fact that you were probably going 85 in a 55; Blame accepted. My bad.

The other driver, however, did not accept my signature of repentance. Instead he laid on his horn harder, sped around me and gave me the other international symbol - let's call it “one way to God.” You with me? I was disappointed (to put it mildly), but being the person of God that I am, I chose to let it go.

UNTIL, I saw the bumper sticker on the back of his car now whizzing by me. It invited others to come experience Grace at OUR CHURCH. Immediately I transformed from the repentant one back into my pastoral role, deciding God had uniquely called me to execute judgment upon this man who not only sinned against God but against our CHURCH! Adrenaline racing, I put pedal to the metal. I was now on a “Mission from God!”

I caught up to him at a stoplight. He was still expressing “creative dissatisfaction” as I rolled down the window. With just a slight trace of smugness I smiled at him and said, “God is good.” He glanced sideways and as a look of recognition and horror simultaneously crossed his face, he said “All that time.” Gotcha! He now gave me the “my bad Pastor, my bad” apology!

Moral of the story - if you have a church bumper sticker on your car, do NOT point someone directly to heaven when they make a driving mistake! Can you imagine?

In our Sermon Series Wrestling with God, we've looked at some of the tough questions skeptics and believers alike wrestle with: Is the Bible Even Believable? How can there be One True Religion? Hasn't Science disproved Christianity? Why does God Allow Suffering? And last week, Pastor Doug looked at the Church's role in injustice. Tough stuff, right? Doesn't get any easier this week — Why are Christians such hypocrites? Why do we act one way on Sunday morning and a whole other way when driving?

It's so easy to see hypocrisy in others isn't it? Raise your hand if you know a hypocrite! Most of us, right? Raise your hand if that person is sitting next to you — no don't. Likely that person would be raising their hand, pointing right back at you. It's really, really easy to see hypocrisy in other people, but not so easy to see in our selves.

So what really is hypocrisy? We throw out words like “fake.” “Phony” “Imposter.” “Deceiver.” Hypocrisy is the gap between what we show and who we are. It’s the difference between what we say and how we live. The difference between our public persona and our private character. And it often involves judging others for things we ourselves are guilty of in private.

We live in a pretty unique time for hypocrisy. Social media has given us great “tools” to share our lives with the world. And is also a perfect breeding ground for hypocrisy. Facebook, instagram, snap chat — places where everyone shows just what we want other people to see . Pictures of our “perfect family” on vacation — when in reality we spent most of the vacation trying to keep everyone from fighting. A friend who posts pictures of her amazing boyfriend and the fabulous times they have on instagram #perfectboyfriend, but in reality she feels she has to always look perfect or Mr. “Perfect Boyfriend” will lose interest. Or here’s a good one — beautiful facebook post of my morning devotion time...here’s my coffee cup — cause one must have coffee when talking with Jesus and my journal... What I’m not saying is that I’m not sure if spent more time getting the picture right than I did reading the bible. Ouch. Hypocrisy hurts.

Clearly hypocrisy is not just limited to Christians. So why are we Christians so often called out on it? As author and pastor Brennan Manning says “The single greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, then walk out the door and deny him with their lifestyle. This is what the unbelieving world ‘simply finds unbelievable.’” The #1 reason people cite for being atheist or leaving the church — Hypocrisy. But it’s not God or Jesus who are the hypocrites. It’s US — the leaders, the people.

Us who sit in church on Sunday and smile and say “Peace be with you” and go home and wage war on Facebook with our neighbors. Us who comment at the PTO meeting, “It is so great that she brings all those kids to church, single mom and all, but bless her heart you think she could get them to be a little better behaved. It’s distracting to those of us regulars....” Hint — whenever a “good Christian” adds the line “Bless Her Heart,” a good word is NOT going to follow. Us who listen on Sundays to how Jesus calls us to care for the poor and hurting and then nod fervently in agreement when our work friends call those in need “freeloaders” saying “Jesus helps those who help themselves.” (P.S. Jesus never said that — see Woodside’s Summer 2017 Sermon Series, “Half Truths!”)

What are we showing to the world? A church full of happy, classy Christians on Sundays, who leave our compassion in the sanctuary and are quick to pass judgment during the week? If this is what we are showing the world about our Jesus why wouldn’t people reject the church?

Thankfully Jesus is clear about this — Jesus HATES hypocrisy. In fact he conducts a major critique of religion in his Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wasn’t addressing non-believers, he was speaking to the religious! He criticizes those who pray, give to the poor and seek to live according to God’s law. What? He criticizes them for WHY they do this — to get acclaim and power for themselves.

Jesus calls out the self-proclaimed “religious people” for legalism, self-righteousness, bigotry, and love of wealth and power. “Wow to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside

are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. “Matthew 23:27-28. “You load people down with burdens they can hardly carry and yet you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.” Luke 11:46. Can you feel the steam and the sting of Jesus’ words?”

Calling out hypocrisy was not just limited to the New Testament and Jesus — Jesus was following the lead of Hebrew prophets such as Isaiah. In Isaiah’s time, the people were complaining “Why have we fasted and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed? Isaiah replies, “On the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers...Do you really think this will please the Lord? No, this is the kind of fasting the Lord requires: free those who are wrongly imprisoned or oppressed... share your food with the hungry...provide shelter to the homeless.” Isaiah 58:2-7.

So how do we close the gap between the whitewashed tombs that we show our lives to be and who we are, really ordinary, sinful people needing and living in God’s grace. How do we stop being hypocrites? We look to the cross; to Jesus. God’s sending of Jesus is the antithesis of hypocrisy. “For God so loved the world that he sent his only son Jesus Christ.’ In one unimaginable triumph of mercy and grace, God came to this earth not as the powerful God and King he is, but as a tiny baby, to truly become like us, to live among us. He came to fulfill the law — to set right the injustices done not by the Romans or the political powers, but by the religious. God is never impressed by religious or moral performance - his grace can only be assessed through repentance, through the giving UP of power. Jesus came to right the world WE made hypocritical. Jesus came to forgive our sins and cover us in grace and love.

When asked what was the most important commandment is, Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Mark 12:28-24. Jesus tells us how to live right here. But are we living out these commandments? Are we loving like Jesus calls us to? Perhaps this is why the world sees us as hypocrites.

Thirty years ago this November, Warren and I stood before God to pledge our love to each other. We asked my uncle to read the great wedding passage on love “1 Corinthians 13.” Anyone else have this passage as part of their wedding ceremony? Uncle Howard walked up to the pulpit and started reading, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I become as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal...Charity suffereth long and is kind, charity envieth not....”And Warren did this not so subtle eyebrow raising head turn to me... Charity? What in the world is he reading?” And demurely I smiled back, “No no, this is fine,” while internally frantically wondering did I give him the wrong passage? This was supposed to be about LOVE not charity.

Uncle Howard was indeed reading the right passage, just in the King James Version with the word charity instead of the word love used in the NIV version. Turns out Uncle Howard was on to something. 1 Corinthians 13 was not written to be an anthem of Christian weddings — to be spoken at a time of love and great unity. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth at a time of great disharmony. The Church at Corinth was diverse and often divided — Jews/Gentiles,

Men/women. Slave/Free. All jockeying for the title of “most religious.” Turns out 1 Corinthians 13 is not a wedding passage at all, but a prescription for how we are to live — the antithesis of hypocrisy. Paul was talking about the kind of love Jesus calls us to show— charity — love for others. If we read this passage as a roadmap for how to live - showing charity to our brothers and sisters, we see how God designed us to live, free from hypocrisy THIS love must be the basis of how we treat others, how we worship, how we serve.

Hypocrisy creeps in when we Christians fail to show that love to the world. At best Christianity becomes a distracting “clanging cymbal or noisy gong.” At worst a hypocritical judge who is envious, arrogant and rude, ready to condemn anyone who does not measure up to our beliefs. We must be LOVE to our divided world. We must reflect Jesus to our hurting world.

I hear Jesus saying, Listen church Listen. Do not be a noisy gong. Put on love. Show my love in all you do. Remember, I have given you CLEAR instructions: “Love the lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27.

How do we live this out? How do we love the Lord and our neighbors? How do we live our faith authentically?

We show our love for God by our Worship. We gather here on Sundays for Worship. Did you ever leave here saying, “Yea, didn’t really get much out of the sermon this week?” Let me let you in on a little something — It’s NOT ABOUT US. Seriously it isn’t! Worship is not for US and what we “get out of it;” it’s for GOD. It’s how we show God our love and adoration. We have an AMAZING God. An AWESOME God. In the words of the psalmist, “Great is the Lord. He is most worthy of praise!” Psalm 145:3. So sing and praise and worship our AMAZING God. Maybe even go crazy and raise your hands — but only if the spirit moves you, NOT because the guy next to you is. *Or else you’ll find yourself needing a remedial hypocrisy sermon.*

“Love your Neighbor as Yourself.” Here at Woodside we have some great ways to support our neighbors. We can support our homeless friends and neighbors in need by helping out at monthly Community Shared Meals or volunteering for Code Blue or Family Promise. We can bring food for area Food Pantries — shelves are right outside of the sanctuary. Habitat for Humanity — Did you know we WE FRAMED A HOUSE RIGHT HERE IN OUR PARKING LOT!! We did. Kids, families, seniors — it was a project anyone could participate in. This fall we’ll be doing more work to get these houses in Morrisville ready for our neighbors.

We can support our neighbors in crisis — by volunteering for one of our outreach ministries: CancerCare, GriefShare, Helping Hands. We can help lead our little ones and young adults by being a Sunday school teacher, Adventure Club/Youth Group Leaders.

Support those seeking recovery by joining the group that leads a monthly CoffeeHouse in Kensington or helping out at our Recovery Worship Service held quarterly right in the Vineyard. These are just a few of the ways you can live out Jesus’s command to “Love our neighbors as ourselves.” More are listed on the bulletin insert. Ask God to show you who is in need, who is hurting, who you can reach out to. Ask Him and do so.

Church, can we stop being a clanging cymbal? Can we stop contributing to the noise/the judgment that can be perceived as religion and live like Jesus calls us to? Can we leave hypocrisy behind and show our true selves to each other and the world? Instead of being quick to judge, can we be quick to look to Jesus and extend his grace and forgiveness? Jesus went to the cross, taking on our sin and hypocrisy, embodying true servanthood and love, to reconcile us to God. Let's reflect Jesus to the world.

So friends, what does God call us to show to the world? LOVE. May it be so.