



The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Proverbs 18:15

## What about the hypocrites?

**General question:** Is the message of Christianity true?

### Also asked as:

How can Christianity be true

- ... since there are so many hypocrites in the church?
- ... since my church-going parents are such hypocrites?
- ... since my church-going co-worker is such a hypocrite?
- ... since so many Christians and Christian leaders are immoral?
- ... since so many priests are pedophiles?
- ... since Christian marriages fail at such a high rate?
- ... since so many Christians are addicted to pornography?
- ... since so many churches are just big time, moneymaking shows?
- ... since Christians conducted the terrible Crusades?
- ... since Christians are hypocritically judgmental?

### Similar questions answered separately:

Is the Bible reliable?

Are miracles possible?

Does God exist?

Is Jesus God?

**A caution:** This can be deeply personal ... an honest question ... or just a casual objection.

### The short answer:

There are hypocrites in the pulpits and the pews of the church. The things they do, ranging from mildly to terribly hypocritical, are contrary to the teaching of the Bible. Their actions challenge the credibility but not the authenticity of the true message of Christianity. However, many Christians today and throughout history have *not* been hypocritical. Jesus is the ultimate non-hypocrite. Moreover, He was highly critical of hypocrites, Matthew 23. If you do not approve of hypocrisy, you agree with Jesus. Do not let hypocrites keep you from someone you agree with.

## The longer answer:

**What is hypocrisy?** The word *hypocrisy* is from the Greek *hupokrisis* meaning to pretend or play a part. Hypocrites are pretenders ... actors. People who are not really Christians but who claim to be Christian are hypocrites. Attending church, being born into a Christian family, or declaring oneself to be Christian does not make anyone a Christian. Believing in Jesus is what makes one a Christian. *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God,"* John 1:12-13. The inconsistency in Christians (and in others) between *who they say they are* and *how they act* is hypocrisy. Hypocrites are generally thought of as people, pretending to be pious and virtuous, who do not live consistently with the high virtues, morals, and ethics that they profess. As Jesus said, they are like *"whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness,"* Matthew 23:27. The question about the hypocrite most often refers to someone who is a Christian but who does not live like one. Often the question arises because of leaders in the church ... or because of hypocritical family, friends, or associates.

**Hypocrites do exist in the church.** It is obvious that hypocrites exist in the church. They have been there for centuries. Their personal lives are marked by hypocrisy ... as are their plans, actions, and even their ministries. Sometimes I think that the people who ask about the hypocrites must know some of the same people that I know. I do not like hypocrisy in any form ... mild or severe. However, the question of the hypocrite seldom involves small issues. Most often, the question is raised over the bigger issues. The reality is that hypocrisy exists in the church today as it has throughout history. Hypocrisy denigrates the credibility (believability) of Christianity but it does not change its authenticity.

**God's view of hypocrisy.** Hypocrisy is denounced in the Bible. Jesus said, *"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men,'"* Matthew 15:7-9. Paul's criticism of Peter's hypocrisy is found in Galatians 2:11-14. Peter challenged believers to put aside hypocrisy, 1 Peter 2:1. Jesus strongly disapproved of hypocrisy. He criticized the hypocrites, as recorded in Matthew 23, six times repeating the words, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,"* verses 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29. Jesus criticized the hypocritical religious leaders for burdening their followers, for wanting to be seated in the places of honor, for wanting to be called by special titles of honor, for exalting themselves, for turning others away from Heaven, for being money focused, for being legalistic about the small things while ignoring the big things, and for appearing clean on the outside while being filthy on the inside. Jesus renounced the Pharisees for disapproving of His healing a woman (crippled for 18 years) on the Sabbath. They were more concerned that He might have violated their view of the Sabbath than that He had mercifully healed her, Luke 13:10-17. As recorded in Matthew 6, Jesus criticized those who very publicly

practiced their righteousness to be noticed by men ... donating to be recognized by others (verses 2-4), praying publicly to look and sound spiritually impressive (verses 5-15), and looking the part when fasting to appear self-denying (verses 16-18).

**An understandable, but illogical, rejection.** It is understandable that people could question the reliability of the message of the Bible when they have observed the hypocrisy of those who are, or claim to be, Christian. However, it is illogical to reject Jesus because of the hypocrites when He agrees that hypocrisy is wrong. Hypocritical Christians are acting contrary to the teachings and principles of true Christianity ... a presupposition recognized in the question about the hypocrite. It could be said that if one did not recognize the value of a non-hypocritical Christian life, that hypocrisy would not be an issue.

**Who are the hypocrites and non-hypocrites?** Many who are called, or call themselves, Christian may be seen as hypocrites. However, many other Christians are non-hypocrites. It is important to understand the differences in these people and their actions. There are different types of Christians ... some real ones and some not real ones ... some hypocritical and some not.

**Growing Christians.** Jesus described entry into the Christian life as an event ... the event of being born-again. He said, "*Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,*" John 3:3. That spiritual birth is the starting point. The product of that spiritual birth is a spiritual baby ... not a spiritual adult. A baby grows into adulthood over many years. It is unreasonable to expect a young growing Christian to act like a mature one. During that growth time, acting like a new baby, a toddler, or a child is not hypocrisy.

**Stunted Christians.** Some Christians have been severely stunted in their growth ... and consequentially are criticized as hypocrites. Enough time has gone by for them to become mature in their faith. However, they are still children. "*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil,*" Hebrews 5:12-14. The world has squeezed too many Christians and churches into its mold. Jesus commissioned Christians to make disciples and not just believers, Matthew 28:18-20. Believers come to Jesus for salvation. Disciples move on from there in obedience to grow and follow Him. Disciples are rooted in His Word, John 8:30-32 ... they love each other with unlimited co-liability, John 13:35 ... and they bring others to Him, John 15:8. They also pay the price in self-denial, Luke 14:25-33. In that passage, Jesus said that those who do not pay the price to be His disciples are like the builder who is mocked for not finishing the tower he started or like the king who surrenders for not paying the price for victory against his enemy. Those believers who do not become disciples are mocked as uncompleted towers. In addition, as they surrender to the world,

the flesh, and the devil, they are seen as hypocrites. Today's church may seem more interested in big buildings and organizations than they are in building disciples. When enough time has gone by for believers to become disciples, but they remain as just believers, they are stunted and seen as hypocrites.

**Exemplary Christians.** There are, and have been, many non-hypocritical Christians. They have paid the price to be His disciples. They are not perfect, but in general, they have lived in obedience to His commands. As a result, the world is a better place. They have told others about Jesus, they have cared for their neighbors, helped others, given of their time and resources, and been personally involved in feeding the poor, building hospitals and schools for those who have none, and sought justice for the oppressed. Jesus was a great example of a non-hypocrite ... as was the Apostle Paul who wrote, "*Be imitators of me, just as I am also of Christ,*" 1 Corinthians 11:1. One of the marks of the life of a disciple is the lack of hypocrisy. That is an exemplary life.

**Fallen Christians.** Christians are not perfect. They are forgiven. But that does not mean that they will not fail. Many Christians and their leaders yield to temptation because of lack of growth, lack of teaching, lack of examples, lack of accountability, and lack of personal and corporate discipline. Their failure is seen as hypocrisy by the watching world. A Christian's hypocrisy is forgiven ... but that does not give them freedom to sin.

**Fake Christians.** There are Church people and leaders who are Christian in name only. They are not true Christians. The early church had them ... the church throughout history has had them ... and they exist in the church today, Matthew 7:20-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Jude 4, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. Their lives, plans, and ministries are often far from the teaching of the Bible. They are the true hypocrites ... pretending to be Christian.

**The true non-hypocritical basis of Christianity.** Jesus, the ultimate non-hypocrite, is the basis of Christianity. Jesus was and is exactly who He said He was ... holy God come to earth as a sinless man. There was nothing inconsistent between His life and His teaching. He was our sinless substitute on the cross. "*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed,*" 1 Peter 2:21-24. Family, friends, associates, church members, and church leaders may let us down. However, we can have confidence to go to Jesus as our always-reliable high priest. "*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,*" Hebrews 4:15-16. The lives, plans, and ministries of Christian leaders and organizations should always match what the Bible teaches in morals, ethics, and purposes. However, the only one who ever accomplished that is Jesus.

**A concluding thought.** It is an unfortunate reality that mild and severe hypocrisy exists in Christianity. If you disapprove of hypocrisy, you are in good company. Jesus also disapproves. You and Jesus agree. Do not let the hypocrites keep you from Jesus ... that would be illogical. Believe in Him and then grow to be His non-hypocritical disciple.

## Answers to specific questions:

**What about the command to not judge others?** This is inappropriately asked, "*Since the Bible says judge not lest ye yourselves be judged, why are Christians so hypocritically judgmental?*" The quote referred to in this question is from the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 7:1-6. Jesus said that we should not judge unless we are willing to be judged by the same standard. He said that we should not try to take the speck out of someone else's eye until we have taken the log out of our own. In the same passage, He taught that we should not give what is holy to the dogs or throw our pearls before swine. Without making judgments, how can we determine the identity of the dogs and swine?

**What about adulterous and immoral clergy?** The Biblical qualifications for church leadership are often ignored when choosing leaders or when allowing leaders to continue. Being above reproach, morally pure, and husband of one wife are just a few of the qualifications, I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9. Selection of leadership should be done very carefully. Additionally, there is a practice in most churches of elevating reasonably young believers (especially if they have a college Bible degree) to leadership in the church or on the mission field. That can be dangerous, I Timothy 3:6. Violation of the requirements for Christian leadership disqualifies someone from that leadership. When the church allows such a one to continue it is perceived as great hypocrisy.

**Are wealthy Christians hypocrites?** Some people believe that financial success is somehow hypocritical for Christians. The Bible does not teach that financial success is a sign of spiritual success nor does it teach that it is a sign of spiritual failure. Church leaders should be free from the love of money, I Timothy 3:3, but the Bible does not state that they should be free from having money. Christian leaders should be reasonably paid for their work. Good Bible teachers and leaders should be paid extra, I Corinthians 9:1-14, I Timothy 5:17-18. Christians are commanded to honor God from their wealth, Proverbs 3:9. Barnabas is a good example. He sold a tract of land and gave the money to the church, Acts 4:36-37. There is a difference between having money and loving money. Loving money is a sin ... having it is not a sin.

**Why are some priests guilty of pedophilia?** The sexual abuse of boys and girls by priests has been a very serious problem. It should never have happened, should have been immediately disclosed, and should have been prosecuted by the church and government in the harshest ways. The abuse and the cover-ups are grievous sins. Jesus said, "*Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be*

*better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea", Matthew 18:5-6. Is this abuse limited to the Catholic Church? No. Is it limited to the clergy? No. Priests, clergy, parents, family members, teachers, and others who are guilty of child abuse are inexcusable, guilty, and should be punished. Moreover, if they are Christian, it is all the more heinous. Such Christians are, "whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness," Matthew 23:27. Jesus and the Bible stand strongly against hurting children.*

**What about pornography among church people and the clergy?** Sociological statistics report that Internet pornography is a pervasive problem in society in boys, girls, men, women, laypeople, and the clergy. The Bible condemns immorality ... even in just looking with lust. Jesus said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,"* Matthew 5:27-28. In the use of pornography, the very small difference between those in the church and those outside the church points to the hypocrisy and immaturity in the church.

**What about controlling and prideful clergy?** Pompous, prideful, controlling clergy are too common. Pride is wrong, Proverbs 11:2, 16:18, and 29:23. I recently heard the founding pastor of an American mega-church preach that pride was good. It is not good. Clergy who desire prominence and public honor are wrong, Matthew 23:5-12. Moreover, those who seek to control their people are wrong. *"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock,"* 1 Peter 5:1-3. Jesus was a servant rather than a dictator. *"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many,'"* Matthew 20:25-28. Church leaders should follow His example and His teaching ... or they are hypocritical.

**What about money-hungry ministers and ministries?** There are greedy leaders who are in the ministry for sordid gain, Titus 1:10-11. That is wrong, 1 Timothy 3:8, Titus 1:7, and 1 Peter 5:2. There are Christian ministries who coerce money from their followers promising health, wealth, and happiness if they give to them. However, giving should be un-coerced. *"Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,"* 2 Corinthians 9:7. The church should no more be a moneymaking business today than the Temple should have been in the day of Jesus. *"The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop*

*making My Father's house a place of business,"* John 2:13-16. Making the church a place of business is hypocritical. Jesus criticized the hypocrites for devouring widows' houses, Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. The church should not coerce money from poor widows. The church should be a place of safety and care for widows, I Timothy 5:3-16.

**Weren't the Crusades hypocritical?** Yes, they were. The question about the hypocrisy of the Crusades may be asked by older people or by students of history. The Crusades were several religious/military campaigns (from 1095 AD until the late 1200's AD) sanctioned by the Catholic Church in Europe to free the Holy Land from Muslim rule. However, these were more political than religious ... and often barbaric and brutal. Some of the campaigns were actually against the Jews as well as against the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches. The Church motivated zealous Crusaders by offering remission of sins through their efforts to free Jerusalem. The Bible states that remission of sins is available only by faith and not by works, Ephesians 2:8-9. Far from any kind of *just war*, the Crusades were planned and conducted in contradiction to the teachings of the Bible. The word Crusade is derived from the French, Spanish, and Latin words for cross. Although done in the name of the cross of Jesus they were far from true Christianity.

**Was God a hypocrite?** The question can be asked because of two Old Testament stories. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and God told Joshua to kill the inhabitants of Canaan. The Ten Commandments include, "*You shall not commit murder,*" Exodus 20:13. The question is: *Was God hypocritical in commanding Abraham and Joshua to commit murder?* Both Old Testament stories need to be seen in context ... the context of what the Bible actually states.

**Abraham** was a friend of God, 2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, and James 2:23. Abraham had a deep and personal relationship with God. He appeared to Abraham and spoke directly to him many times, Genesis 12:1-3, 12:7, 13:14-17, 15:1-21, and 17:1-22. The Lord came to his tent for dinner, Genesis 18. God made promises to Abraham about his land, protection, blessings, influence, and very importantly, to give an heir to him when he and his wife Sarah were already old. The birth of Isaac to those two elderly people was proof to Abraham that God kept His promises. Then He told Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice. How could God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? That would have negated God's promise that his descendants through Isaac would be as numerous as the stars, Genesis 15:5 and 21:12. Abraham had such a close relationship with God that he knew that God was real and that His message to him about Isaac was accurate. Abraham trusted God to raise Isaac from the dead if he actually carried through with the sacrifice, Hebrews 11:19. However, we can see expectation in Abraham of a substitute lamb being provided by the Lord, Genesis 22:8. God did provide a substitute sacrifice, a ram to die in place of Isaac. From the text of Genesis 22, it is clear that God never intended for Abraham to kill his son. God was not a hypocrite.

**Joshua** was commanded to conquer, divide, and settle the land of Canaan ... the land promised to Abraham. The Old Testament record of the commandment from God to Joshua is very clear, "*When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering*



*to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them”, Deuteronomy 7:2. And, "You shall consume all the peoples whom the Lord your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you," Deuteronomy 7:16. The question can be asked, Was God a hypocrite in commanding Joshua and the army of Israel to murder all the inhabitants of Canaan? God is God ... and He can judge the people that He has created. The Canaanites had become a defiled people guilty of incest, menstrual sex, adultery, infant sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality, Leviticus 18. God punished the Canaanites for their grievous sins, Leviticus 18:24-30. As God, He certainly has the right to do that. He was not being hypocritical. Had God not judged them, wouldn't He have been hypocritical and immoral?*

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