

How Can I Believe What is Often Associated with Hate and Hypocrisy?

Series: How Can I Believe?

Brad Bailey – May 27, 2018

How Can I Believe What is Often Associated with Hate and Hypocrisy?

Series: How Can I Believe?

Brad Bailey – May 27, 2018

How Can I Believe What is Often Associated with Hate and Hypocrisy?

Series: How Can I Believe?
Brad Bailey – May 27, 2018

Intro

Today we are **concluding our series entitled: “How Can I Believe?”** In this series we have been engaging the questions that can arise in the process of believing in Christ.

So in the recent past weeks we have engaged the questions of How can I believe in God...in the Bible...in the historical Jesus... in there being any distinct truth... in the nature of a good God amidst a world in which there is suffering.

Today... we conclude engaging the question:

How Can I Believe What is Often Associated with Hate and Hypocrisy?

Hate and hypocrisy...are two characteristics that most people don't believe are good. When these are deemed to be associated with those who identify as “Christians”... it effects both the credibility of the good that the faith can bring...and it effects the desirability socially. [1a]

Hate refers to how some who associated with being “Christians” ... can be more judgmental. It may be as underhanded or harsh words... to wars that are waged in the name of religion.

Hypocrisy... can reflect so many ways in which ... those who claim to be “Christians” ... see to live inconsistently.

Here are some actual statements people have made... [1b]

“There are so many conflicts over religion because of extremists forcing their views that I feel I wouldn't want to be associated with that.”

“Why is it I have more Christian values (being a non church goer) than some so called Christians ?!”

“My brother-in-law objects because his sister was 'religious' and she would not talk to their mother. It put him off religion to see a religious person behave like that.”

“My objection is not to God, but to his so-called representatives on earth; pedophile priests, charlatans, evangelistic millionaires...why does God allow this?”

There are numerous ways in which negative associations are made...

- **There was a woman who sought to be faithful to following Christ marries a man who expresses a serious commitment to the same faith in Christ.... marriage unfolds into control**

and abuse.... ending in divorce.... she finds her own community more distant from her. As she begins to consider future relationships... her Christian friends and family only ask her one question about any man..."Is he a Christian?" And she wonders.

- A **news correspondent** works with public response from social media... and notices that the most callous responses come from those claiming to be Christians. He wonders.
- One of the **local restaurants near a large church** gets a lot of business on Sunday afternoons....but it has become the least popular shift to work...because these religious people are known for being low tippers. Each of those waiters and waitresses wonders why.
- A **young life**, growing up as part of a church community, always **felt their parents desire** for them to be a "**good person**"...and an **underlying assumption** that "Christian" was synonymous with "good person." "**Non-Christian**" was synonymous with "**bad person.**" As they began to develop friendships over the years....it didn't always prove to be true. And they wondered.
- Then there are **so many leading the way that fall in the ditches of depravity themselves**. From **child molestation** to **secret encounters**, Christianity is at **no loss for scandal**. Then there are the great historical black-eyes from **forced conversion** (inquisition) to wars being lead by the church (the crusades).
- We may look at **our own lives**...and wonder. (What I see in myself...and wonder.)

I don't want to loose perspective here... I know that the media will always feed our appetite for the drama of scandals... and the failures of others. But the fact is that **leaders who seem the most devoted and passionate...fall...and fail...and we may wonder.**

I think this question can be felt by those who don't yet believe ..and those who do believe.

The associations of "Christians" with hate and hypocrisy is like an outer ring which may cause some to feel socially safer outside... and others socially trapped inside.

This question is one I feel personally.

When I first heard the Gospel... introduced to this figure Jesus... profound love ... and grace.... unlike anything I could imagine.

That would lead to a life defining desire to **give my life vocationally** to gathering lives in relationship to him... to **gathering and growing lives who live out that love...**distinct... and an **authenticity that is made possible by grace.**

So to find myself associated with that which is **deemed to reflect hate and hypocrisy...** is one of the most difficult decisions to find myself in.

So how do I find my way forward?

It seems that the most natural reaction is simply anger.

I get angry at... **those who seem to reflect so badly** on the name of Christ they claim to be committed to.

But I can also become angry with **those who create far more association than actually exists.**

I can be angry at those who use and even mis-use such examples to attack the whole of my faith. There is **something deeply deceptive** in the **underlying premise** that forms the cultural narrative.

I have heard people comedians like Bill Mahar ... or commentators... give really **comedic pictures of religious people**... Christians... while it **may speak sharply to a truth**... it is always **profoundly construed** shaping of the whole of reality.

There is **no desire to actually engage truth**. It's about **selling a story**...and **sensationalism sells**. It's about **selling your comedy... or commentary**... which is really about making you look smart and others stupid. **It's own form of hiding.**

You know that so much of what you value and deem good ... emerged from taking this seriously...the hospitals... care of widows and orphans... the value of individuals ... foundational to democracy.

So I can find myself simply angry at the religious “culture” I am associated with... and the secular community that I can see is often deceptively shaping reality to justify themselves and avoid the larger truth.

Where does this leave me?

If all I do is hate the haters...it's a pretty shallow virtue.

If all I do is claim a self-righteously superiority to those who are self-righteous... something isn't fully right.

And to those who may choose to stay outside... to avoid belief... you may find that all you have is a secular version of the same hate and hypocrisy.

Where does one look beyond the anger?

Jesus.

I find that the very hope against hate and hypocrisy is found in him.

If we will look and listen we will discover that hate and hypocrisy were at the forefront of what he confronted in in the world.

And he engaged them as only that which the divine can.

It is in face of the self-righteousness of both religious and secular culture... that the voice of Jesus stands so unique. He defies the self-righteousness of religious superiority... and the self-righteousness of secular superiority.

Jesus calls us beyond hate...

The fierce power of Rome...and all the hate that rose between Jew and Gentile... (rivaling Democrat and Republican) ...but also within the Jewish culture.

Matthew 5:43-47 (NIV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Love is conditional on whether people like you...and agree with you.

So here Jesus calls people to life beyond the hate that is so common...but not with some false idea of tolerance that says there is no truth. [2]

Jesus taught inclusive love and exclusive truth.

**That is the way forward... the way of true tolerance.
Does not tell me to go and agree... but rather to love.**

What strikes me is that he doesn't support the superiority of those who are self-righteous. He quite aware that the pagan culture is going to be different....and doesn't seem to simply try to hate it into order.

He sets the pattern of being willing to die...not kill...for the cause.

Hate is not rooted in disagreement...but in disregard. Hate is overcome by love. We are called into God's love... to that compassion that Jesus bears in our lives... a compassion that does not dismiss truth...nor is it dependent on agreement.

Jesus calls us to

Jesus calls us beyond hypocrisy.... [3]

Matthew 23:1-5, 24-26 (NIV)

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees ... do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵

"Everything they do is done for men to see.

... ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. ²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Can there be a greater indictment against hypocrisy.

But it is not that which anyone escapes. The religious leaders had created a culture of it... people could feel it... so Jesus calls it out...but he focuses not on the flaw in some class of personhood...but in a principle that affect everyone.

Matthew 6:5-6 (NIV)

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners **to be seen by men.** I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Key phrase is that captures the root of hypocrisy... is that their behavior is "to be seen by men." "Hypocrite" was a word first developed in Greek culture used in the theater. It refers to the "masked one." Jesus grabbed this term and used it to speak of this in the religious world.

Jesus is focused on the religious leaders because they are sowing the corrupted way of connecting with God. But he warns everyone not to follow such an example because it is a problem we are all vulnerable to. Hypocrites are not a class of people.

The problem comes with...

Focusing more on how we appear than what we are.

When **impressing others** matters more than the **inner life with God**... we become actors... "hypocrites." It is the "imposter" that keeps us hidden from God and others.

In effect Jesus describes hypocrisy as the sad state of a person who reduces himself to being an actor on a stage, because he does not know God the Father. When one seeks life without God, we live life in a desperate search for human approval and applause. We discern our dignity and worth, not from God, but from what other human beings think of us.

The actor is defined by their role. We all have some degree of a false self... a façade... that we have formed throughout our lifetime. This false self can never experience being loved... because they are not real. In essence it is what it means to be lost.

**Where does Jesus send us to become found?
To the Father.**

He sees all. How will that feel? Vulnerable. Naked. That's why authenticity is hard. But he dares to open himself to God. As The Psalmist wrote:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” - Psalm 139:23-24

Our hope lies in being more focused and open about the process of transformation...than the false idea of our own perfection.

The opposite of hypocrisy is not perfection... it is authenticity.

Hypocrisy is not about people failing to live up to your standard... or even their own.

Hypocrisy is pretending that we are living up to the standard.

We see a powerful example in the disciple Peter. He was so passionate to be faithful. And at the point in which Christ speaks of suffering... he refuses to accept it. And when Jesus speaks of how many will fall away.... Peter declares” “If everyone else denies you...I never will.”

There it is... claiming he is unlike everyone else. In that moment he is declaring that he is perfect ... and is cutting himself off not only from others...but from himself. For when For within a day...he would deny Jesus 3 times...and he becomes lost. Even after Jesus is risen... Peter is still lost...until Jesus meets him in his failures...and restores him.
... “I will never deny you”

For those who may consider that they should avoid faith in Christ because of the association with hate and hypocrisy...

1. It is a problem that shouldn't be dismissed.

In his book *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller tells the story of how he and his friends built a confessional booth on the campus of their liberal university. When people entered to confess their sins, Miller would instead confess to them the sins of the church, apologizing for the pain it has caused throughout history—its mistreatment of homosexuals and women, burning people at the stake, etc. Among the students on campus, this helped Christianity gain credibility and a hearing. That's where our response to these charges needs to begin, and the model for this is Jesus. Jesus began his ministry with a call to “repent” (Mark 1:15), but as historians point out, he

was not talking to irreligious people. He was speaking to many of the most religious people of the day.

2. It is a problem that we all ultimately share.

More about our common shame... project onto others... align with power... things which are not exclusive to religion..

3. It is a problem that we can discover Biblical faith has a self-correcting potential for.

Even a scholar critical of the church has noted that Christianity has built in corrective... the Old Testament prophets...and the final prophet that Jesus becomes. So it's been said, that you can criticize the Christian faith for allowing hypocrisy...but you will find that it has it's own corrective. [4]

It is what allows Martin Luther King to see the problem and not call people to abandon their faith... but rather calls them to become more serious about the truth of their faith.

4. It is a problem that Christ engages most and provides the means to freedom from.

There I find not only grace for those I have allowed myself to hate... but grace for being hateful.

The Gospel is good news of mercy to the undeserving.

The symbol of the religion of Jesus is the cross, not the scales.

The very root of receiving Christ is humility. The entire Gospels are accounts of human pride confronted by God's grace. The pride in Roman secular power and force...and the pride of self righteous religion.

CLOSING:

To those of us who find ourselves feeling trapped on the inside...who are committed to Christ... what I have found is this...

At some point ... I will have to choose to withdraw into a place of self-righteous superiority... that may feel safe from the associations... or I will choose Jesus.

Some of us may **feel ashamed what others who claim** the title "Christian" do....but I am not going to be ashamed of the one who gave his life to meet me in my need.

We will find that the greatest hope lies in reclaiming Jesus ...with humility in ourselves...and pride in him.

PRAYER

Additionally presented...leading into worship...Three nights ago...a unique gathering took place in Washington DC...with leaders and lives from many traditions... all under the banner of "Reclaiming Jesus"

The central call was that of reclaiming a commitment to Jesus... declaring a commitment to overcome the hate and hypocrisy.

PICTURE... VIDEO

Bishop Michael Curry, the minister who electrified the royal wedding between Meghan Markle and Prince Harry with a powerful sermon on love, returned to the US with a message for his countrymen: "Love your neighbor."

"We are not a partisan group. We are not a left-wing group. We are not a right-wing group. We are a Jesus movement." — The Rev. Michael B. Curry

Resources:

The following were not generally used for this message, but are writings or videos which I found could serve as good resources for those who are engaging this topic further.

Faithful Christianity Means a Walking Hypocrite? Andrew Marin April 8, 2011
<https://www.redletterchristians.org/faithful-christianity-means-a-walking-hypocrite/>

The Great Pretender! (The Anatomy of Hypocrisy) By: Dr. Steven C. Riser
<https://www.jashow.org/articles/guests-and-authors/dr-steven-c-riser/the-great-pretender-the-anatomy-of-hypocrisy/>

A more extensive study of hypocrisy: examples in the Bible, how it develops, and more.

"Why are Christians hypocrites?" – Doug Schaupp
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uo1p5ZM8nyw>

Kings Church – short answer to problem of charlatans, pedophiles
<http://kings.church/bigobjections/media/priests-charlatans/video.html>

Exposing America's Biggest Hypocrites: Evangelical Christians - 11/24/2017
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/exposing-americas-biggest-hypocrites-evangelical_us_5a184f0ee4b068a3ca6df7ad

Challenging article regarding the Evangelical support of Trump and Moore

Let's Stop Pretending Christianity is Actually Relevant, Okay? By Benjamin Sledge -Mar 22, 2017
<https://blog.heartsupport.com/lets-stop-pretending-christianity-is-actually-relevant-okay-ade4c00dabcc>

Excellent description of how the early church was experienced in contrast to today.

Notes:

1. First quotes are drawn from actual responses used at Kings Church

<http://kings.church/bigobjections/media/priests-charlatans/video.html>

All the descriptions which then follow are my paraphrases of actual objections found on the internet... which are good examples of the diversity of ways that this problem is experienced.

1b. The late Christopher Hitchens said, "Religious faith as evidenced by ordinary followers is the single strongest proof that there is no God."

2a. Another teaching that one cannot miss is...

Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

The term "raca" means... "empty headed"... and captures that speaking of another in a way that is demeaning and degrading ... carries the spirit of murder... because it is a form of cursing or killing another.

He continues saying that if we are coming to worship...and aware of hate... stop...and go seek peace.

2b. Some may note that Jesus spoke of "hating" one's own father and mother in contrast to one's love for him. This is a radical statement...but most understand that he taught one to love all...and to love family...and cared for his own mother even when dying. His point was that of speaking into the power of allegiance that had developed in ancient Middle Eastern culture...in which such a strong obligation to allegiance was presumed that one could not be faithful to God. For more on this, see: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2014/july/family-ties.html>

3. The other aspect that is associated with hypocrisy, which I chose not to expound on in this message, is that of focusing more on the problems in others than in ourselves.

Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

When others criticize "Christians" of being hypocrites or hateful and the like... we can presume there is both an element of fair truth and unfair simplicity in the indictment. I believe it's important that we not hide or dismiss such criticisms under the veil of "persecution. the Scriptures recognize we must recognize that we can be criticized for our own wrongdoing.

In 1 Peter 4:14-16 we're told, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed. ..." sometimes we are insulted for proclaiming the good news of salvation in Christ. But listen to what follows: "If you suffer, however, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler."

The Apostle Peter is more or less saying: If you suffer for sharing the good news of Christ, great, you're blessed. But if you suffer just because you're being a criminal or acting like an idiot, then don't blame it on Christ.

The word "meddler" means busybody: someone who inserts himself into matters that are not his own. Might this include some people involved in the Twitter, Facebook and "comments" showdowns of our day?

In regards to the Scriptures consistent teaching regarding hypocrisy, some other passages:

Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)

³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Galatians 6:3 (NIV)

If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

1 Peter 2:16 (NIV)

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

1 John 4:20 (NIV)

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Matthew 23:1-5, 11-15 (NIV)

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ **Everything they do is done for men to see**

¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. ¹³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁴ ¹⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. ²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

4. Drawn from Tim Keller - Isn't the Christian Church the Best Proof Against God? Tim Keller at Veritas - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnbauJtqKF8>