

WHY ARE RELIGIOUS CHRISTIANS SO MEAN?

RC BLAKES

1 John 4:20-21 (NIV)

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

There's a painful contradiction within religious communities: the disconnect between professed faith and unkind behavior. Scripture is unequivocal—authentic relationship with God transforms the heart toward love, not hatred. When those who claim divine kinship exhibit sustained patterns of malice, contempt, or cruelty toward others, they stand in direct opposition to the foundational commandment of Christ.

The following analysis explores why this occurs and how such behavior fundamentally betrays the essence of true Christianity.

Seven Reasons Why Religious People Can Be Unkind:

1. Building Walls to Feel Secure

When people feel their faith or identity is being questioned, they sometimes respond by putting up walls. Being against “outsiders” or “different believers” can make their own group feel tighter and safer. It's a defense mechanism.

Luke 10:33-37

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him...Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man...? The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus constantly reached across social and religious lines. His story of the Good Samaritan makes the hero someone the religious crowd looked down on. Real Christian identity comes from being united in Christ, not from being against everyone else.

2. Caring More About Being Right Than Being Kind

When having the correct beliefs becomes the most important thing, people who believe differently are seen as a threat. This leads to looking down on others while calling it "defending the truth."

1 Corinthians 13:2

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Matthew 23:23

Woe to you... You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.

The Bible is clear: without love, even perfect knowledge is worthless. Jesus saved his strongest criticism for religious people who were strict on rules but ignored justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

3. Using Religion to Hide Personal Hurts

Sometimes people carry deep personal pain, shame, or insecurity. Instead of finding healing, they use religion as a shield. Their harshness toward others can be a way of deflecting their own unresolved hurt.

Romans 2:4

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness... not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For I am gentle and humble in heart.

God's approach is kindness that leads to change. Jesus invites the burdened to find rest in his gentleness, not to take out their burdens on others. True faith starts with admitting our own need, not attacking others.

4. Fear of Losing Influence

When religious groups feel their place in society is shrinking, they can become defensive and hostile.

They fight to hold onto cultural power or tradition, mistaking it for defending the faith itself.

1 Peter 2:12

Live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God.

Philippians 2:5-7

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.

The early church changed the world through attractive, humble service, not by clutching power. Jesus's example was giving up divine privilege to serve. Christian witness is about drawing people in through good living, not pushing them away through force.

5. Turning Faith Into a Scorecard

Faith gets reduced to a list of behaviors to check off. Others then become people to judge and compare yourself against, which breeds a "better-than-you" attitude.

Luke 18:13-14

But the tax collector... beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man... went home justified before God.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Jesus's story of the Pharisee and the tax collector shows God approves the one who admits his failure, not the one who boasts of his goodness. Salvation is a gift received with empty hands, not a trophy earned by being good enough.

6. Assuming “We’re In, You’re Out”

Some teachings about the end times can make believers view outsiders as doomed and beyond care.

This makes compassion seem pointless or even disloyal to God's plan.

Matthew 25:40

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these... you did for me.

1 Timothy 2:3-4

God our Savior... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Jesus said how we treat the most overlooked person is how we treat him. The Bible says God wants everyone saved. Christ came to save the world, not to condemn it in advance. Our job is to love, not to sort.

7. Putting the Institution Before the Mission

Churches and religious organizations can start acting like any other institution—focused on self-preservation. Questions, critics, or new ideas are seen as threats to authority rather than conversations to have.

Mark 10:42-45

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Jesus flipped the script on power. Greatness means service; leadership means sacrifice. The church is called to give its life away in love, not to protect its own status, budget, or building at all costs.

2 Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Ephesians 4:15

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

At its core, meanness in religious people often comes from inverting the gospel: it makes faith about securing our own tribe rather than receiving God's grace. It trades the shocking, self-giving love of the cross for a defensive, fearful posture.

The fix isn't just trying harder to be nice. It's returning to the strange, beautiful heart of Christianity: that we are strongest when we admit we're weak; that we lead by serving; and that we can only tell the truth when we do it in love. When religious people forget this, they become the very thing Jesus came to save us from.

