

**Sermon – August 22, 2021**

***“Why Are There So Many Hypocrites in Church?”***

**Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID**

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Grace, mercy and peace be to each of you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

I invite you to pray with me as we open ourselves up once again to the teaching of God’s Word.

PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to reveal your will and grace, and to restore us to You. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to receive Your word, to focus our lives around Jesus’ redeeming grace, and empower us for witness. This we ask in Christ’s holy name. Amen

One day Robert Redford was walking through a hotel lobby, when a woman recognized him and ran over to him. With great excitement, she gushed, “Are you the real Robert Redford?”

As the doors of the elevator closed, he replied, “Only when I am alone.”  
How hard is it to be the real me, or the real you, all the time?

How many of you remember the true story of Frank Abagnale, Jr., whose story was told by Steven Spielberg in the movie, “Catch Me If You Can?”

Before his 19th birthday, Frank Abagnale, Jr. had successfully performed cons worth millions of dollars by posing as a Pan Am airline pilot, a Georgia doctor, and a Louisiana parish prosecutor.

His primary crime was check fraud, and he became so skillful that the FBI later employed him to help in catching other check forgers. Frank Abagnale, Jr. was a real-life pretender, or another description we might use is a real-life ... “hypocrite.”

You see, by definition “an insincere person is one who pretends to be what he is not” (Webster’s Dictionary).

Spiritually speaking, we would say that a hypocrite is a person who pretends to have beliefs or practices, which he or she does not actually possess.

In other words, a hypocrite is not only someone who does not practice what one preaches, but is a person who does the opposite of what one preaches.

Now that we have a better understanding of the word “hypocrite”, do you think there are many hypocrites in the Church? Some people sure do!

When surveyed as to why they didn’t attend church, or have dropped out of church, many responses said that they often don’t SEE Christ in those who claim to follow Him.

Their responses often went like this: “If Christianity is real, why doesn’t the church look more like Jesus?”

Now when we consider the way the mainstream media has portrayed Christianity in the recent past, we should not be surprised at the negative attitudes that many people have.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that some Christians have given the media a lot of ammunition to use against us – how about child sex-abuse in the church, or high-profile Christians getting caught up in sex scandals and money schemes, or churches protesting at military funerals.

All of this leaves many skeptics wondering, “If Christianity is real; then, why are there so many hypocrites in the church?”

If we were asked that question today, how would we answer it?

First, I believe we should begin by admitting that there are some real hypocrites in the church, but most people in the church are real, faithful Christians.

What do I mean by the phrase “real, faithful Christians”?

Let’s discuss what we think a “real, faithful Christian” looks like. First, a “real, faithful Christian” is a...

### Forgiven Sinner

Perhaps you have seen the bumper sticker that reads, “Christians aren’t perfect, just forgiven.”

The Bible never claims that followers of Christ are perfect. It just says that those who have faith in Jesus will be perfectly forgiven.

You see there’s a big difference between being a sinner and being a hypocrite. All hypocrites are sinners, but not all sinners are hypocrites.

For many people in the world, there is a misguided assumption that a Christian is someone who no longer sins. But nothing could be further from the truth, and the Bible says just the opposite as well.

Look at these verses from 1 John ...

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us ... if we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us ... if anybody does sin, we have an advocate ... Jesus Christ ... the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and ... the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 1:8-2:2

The hypocrite then is the one who claims to be without sin. The real Christian is the one who freely admits that he (or she) is a sinner.

The true follower of Christ may struggle with sin, but when they recognize their sin, what do they do? (pause) They repent, receive forgiveness, and turn away from that sin.

The true hypocrite, on the other hand, doesn’t really struggle to overcome his sin – he just tries

to hide it. The hypocrite says, “When I’m in church, I’ll behave like a Christian. I’ll say the prayers and sing the songs and obey the rules. But when I’m out in the world, I’ll do what I want to do, and behave as the world behaves.”

The hypocrite is the one who is attempting to live two different and separate lives simultaneously, depending on who is around him.

So, what I am trying to say is that there is a big difference between committing sin and living in sin. Living in sin is hypocritical, and committing sin is not.

Christians aren’t perfect, but we are forgiven. The church is not a place of super saints, but a hospital for sick sinners seeking forgiveness and transformation.

So, real, faithful Christians are forgiven sinners, but they are also –

### Not What They Used To Be.

When a person looks at members of the church and still sees sinners, one thing they often fail to take into consideration is how FAR each of us has come.

Our transformation process to become more Christ-like is not instantaneous, even though we might wish it were.

So, outsiders might look at a Christian and say, “A real Christian shouldn’t lose his temper, or use foul language, or struggle with pornography, right?”

And it is true that our calling as Christians includes putting all those kinds of things behind us.

But think about how things would look different, if rather than focusing on how far people fall short, we think about how far they have come.

How much have you changed for the better over the years since you became a Christian? How many of the sins of your past have you been able to put behind you?

So, if any of us could look back in time at each other’s lives, would we be able to clearly see how much progress has been made? I really think so.

So, the truth of the matter is – all of us are in-process, and even though we have a long way to go, we’re not what we used to be. And we should thank God every day that we are not! We should thank God for the progress we have made to become a more Christ-like person.

So, we have seen that real Christians are forgiven sinners, who change as time passes, so they are no longer what they used to be. But there is still more to the story, since real Christians are becoming...

### What They Will Be.

We all know that real Christians will be transformed completely ... will be made perfect ... someday.

We know that when Christ returns, we will be instantaneously and radically changed, and we will be taken to that perfect place where we will spend eternity with Him.

So, as Real Christians that are waiting for that day when we will be with our Lord for eternity, we are committed ...

1. to live our lives daily as witnesses to God's love for us,
2. to confess and overcome our sin daily through faith, and
3. to develop the character of Christ within us and allow the Holy Spirit to grow our lives through service to others.

That's why being a Christian gives us such hope ... because we KNOW that God is not finished with us yet.

Hopefully, each one of us can see how God is helping us narrow that gap between what I should be and what I am, AND between how I should be living, and how I am presently living.

All that being said ... for a moment, let's bring the focus back to our original question...

"Why Are There So Many Hypocrites in Church?"

One response could be, "While it is true that there are some hypocrites in the church, is that a valid reason for your unbelief or disobedience?"

One person said their favorite response to the question is "You can go to church with a few hypocrites, or you can go to hell with all of them."

Though true ... that is probably not the most sensitive response.

What do you think of the comment that Christianity does not stand or fall on the way Christians have acted throughout history, or are even acting today? Does Christianity stand or fall on our behavior? What do you think?

I would argue that Christianity ONLY stands or falls on the person of Jesus Christ ... not on how you and I behave. And Jesus certainly was no hypocrite. He consistently lived what He taught.

Even Jesus' greatest critics agree that His character and teachings are among the greatest in history. Whether people practice Christianity sincerely or not, the truth about Jesus is still the truth.

An author once wrote (D. Collins) quote, "I have been a Christian for nearly twenty-five years and, in that time, I have known Christians who were liars, thieves, drunkards, etc.

Yet such hypocrisy has never led me to say that WHAT Jesus teaches is untrue or invalid. If all who claim to be Christian are hypocrites, and I am the only one who is sincere, then so be it.

I will remain faithful to God until I draw my last breath. I cannot deny truth simply because others do not practice it." (end of quote)

We must not let other people's failings discourage us to the point of unfaithfulness.

The key obviously is how can we avoid hypocrisy. Scripture contains several important principles that can help us avoid hypocrisy.

First, is the principle to focus on...

fixing yourself, rather than others.

We should strive to practice what we preach.

Second is to make sure that we ...

don't neglect the most important commands of God ... as we try to carry out any minor or specific commands.

For example, although regular worship attendance on Sunday is important, it doesn't make up for a lack of love, humility, or truthfulness every other day of the week.

The third important principle is to focus on the ...

internal as well as the external.

We should be as concerned about inner righteousness (the things we think about), as much as outer righteousness (the actions we take). Obviously, this is important because God can see both the inner and the outer.

But it is also important because the outer springs from the inner, and if we don't do well with the inner, then we will have a hard time mastering the outer.

Final important principle that will help us avoid hypocrisy is to be more concerned with what ...

God thinks, then with what people think.

Ultimately, we are supposed to be God-pleasers, not people-pleasers.

It is not hypocrisy to fall into sin, but it becomes hypocritical when we stop struggling against sin, and decide to live in sin, while pretending that we are not.

Praise God that we don't have to hide our sin, but that we can confess it, repent of it, and receive forgiveness ... only because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is fascinating how everything in the church happens in the shadow of the cross.

As we live in that shadow, may God help each of us be real Christians more and more each day as we sense the approaching of Jesus Second Coming.

May God be with us daily as we choose to repent of our sinfulness. God is good! All the time!  
All the time! God is Good! Amen

**CLOSING PRAYER:** Gracious Father, we thank You for calling us into Your Kingdom and strengthening us to make God-pleasing choices every day. We thank you most of all, Lord, for Your Son, who sacrificed His very life so we could be with You for eternity through our faith in

Him. We are a grateful and humble people as we bow in prayer to You. In Jesus Holy name we pray. Amen