

I Don't Go To Church Because The Church Is Full Of Hypocrites

How many times have you heard the following? "I don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites!" I heard it again from someone this last week.

Tragically, there are thousands of people who won't darken the door of the church because they say that the church is full of hypocrites.

Now, it may be easy for us to get defensive over this accusation. However, we have to confess that this accusation is – right. Yes, you heard that correctly. The church is indeed full of a bunch of hypocrites. Take a look around the church on any given Sunday, and you will see a bunch of hypocrites. Every single one of us at church is a hypocrite.

But what about people who make this accusation? Aren't they hypocrites as well? Some may be, but most are not. Let me explain all of this.

In his Letter to the Romans, specifically chapter 6, Paul tells you and me that there are only two masters in this world; either a person is a slave to sin, or they are a slave to God (6:19-23). Either a person is in bondage to sin – under sin's rule and authority – or they are a bondservant to God – under God's rule and authority. There is no middle ground. There is no autonomous neutral position for anybody. There are only two teams – sin or God. And so, here is the reason why unbelievers are typically not hypocrites. An unbeliever is a slave to sin, which means that they do whatever they feel like doing while ignoring God. In other words, being a slave to sin means that you don't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right anything for that matter. Unbelievers are not under the influence of righteousness; they neither have faith or the Holy Spirit, so they do whatever they want.

And so, it should not surprise us when unbelievers act and think like unbelievers. It is not hypocritical when a person who is enslaved to sin – sins. That is logically consistent. When ungodly people do ungodly things, they are acting and behaving just as we would expect.

However, what about us who consider ourselves to be Christians? Paul tells you and me that we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God. Through our Baptisms, you and I have been snatched from master sin and placed as bondservants of Christ. Through the mighty waters of baptism, Jesus is our Master. Righteousness is our gift. You and I have been freed from master sin and given the benefits of God's holiness and everlasting life. But this is where the problem arises. The world looks at you and me, and what do they see? They see hypocrites. And guess what? They are right. You and I have been freed from master sin and placed under the Lord God to walk in perfect newness of life; however, we don't. Sure, you and I really want to do what is right, but we can't. We know perfectly well that we shouldn't sin, but we can't help ourselves. When we want to do good, we don't, and when we try not to do wrong, we do it anyway. And so, the world is right. We are a bunch of hypocrites. Don't deny it - we are. The unbelievers are right about us. Through our baptisms, we are servants of Christ, but our actions betray us – by our actions, it appears that we are servants of sin.

I don't have to convince you right now that this is a terrible predicament. It should bother you and me. How shall we resolve this?

Some 500 years ago, Martin Luther wrote in the 95 Theses that the entire life of believers should be repentance. In other words, repentance is not a prefabricated elaborate ritual. It is not something that can be bought at one time for all time. No, instead, repentance is a life-long project for all believers. It must be personal, it must be sincere, and it must take place throughout all of our lives. In a word, repentance acknowledges our hypocrisy. It acknowledges the inconsistency. You see, being a Christian is not about you and me chasing some moralistic carrot on a stick on a road to flawlessness. We are not trying to do good and be good to earn brownie points from God. We are not chasing perfection. Instead, we have been chased. Goodness is given as a gift. In other words, you don't do good work to become a Christian, but you do good works because you already are a Christian. Or, let's phrase it this way, you do not do good works to buy yourself out of sin's slavery, but you do good works because you have already been redeemed out of sin's slavery. And when we don't do good works? Well... that's the point - we repent.

In Romans 6, Paul stresses to you and me that being a Christian has never been about accumulating morality points and holding them before God to show that we are somehow worthy. No! Being a Christian is being snatched from master sin and delivered unto master Jesus. Being a Christian is a work of God - a divine rescue of you and me, where we are free from master sin, master death, and master evil.

And so, because we are freed from sin and because we belong to Jesus, we walk in newness of life. We walk in holiness. We walk in righteousness because we belong to the Righteous One – Jesus. But again, we don't always walk in

righteousness. Instead, we often act as if we still belong to master sin. Like the prodigal son who left the goodness of his father's house for hellish living, like the prostitute Gomer (the unfaithful wife of Hosea) who abandoned her faithful husband for prostitution, like a man looking intently looking in a mirror and then forgetting what he was like, and like a dog returning to its own vomit, we Christian are prone to wander and leave the God that loves us. We forget who we belong to, and we run back to master sin. We act like unbelievers when we in reality, we are baptised saints placed in God's goodness and holiness. Again, we are hypocrites.

What are we to do? Repent. Yes, you and I need to repent. Not just once but every single day - as often as we wander back to master sin.

But doesn't our Lord grow tired of this continual repentance?

We should find much comfort in the Psalms – hearing about the Old Testament saints repenting of their sins before God almighty. Consider King David for a moment. One day King David saw a woman bathing. He liked that woman. So, using his power as king, he slept with her, got her pregnant, and then got her husband killed. Master sin sure had its way with King David. And yet, in Psalm 51, David cries out, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and declare me clean from my sin! For I acknowledge my rebellious acts, and my sin is always before me. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow! Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit inside me!” (portions of Psalm 51).

In other words, David was brought to repentance. He acknowledged his sin with Bathsheba. And the Lord? The Lord did not despise David's repentance. In repentance, the Lord did not regard David with contempt but met David with divine mercy.

So hear this! Daily repentance is at the heart of the Christian life. It is hard to recognise our sins; it is hard to grieve for our horrible sins each day, and yet at the same time, while it is difficult for us to repent, God almighty and the angels of heaven rejoice greatly when we do. Yes, there is joy when we repent because, through the gifts of repentance and faith, we are centred right where we are supposed to be – in the Lord's grace and goodness.

While the world may accuse us of being hypocritical Christians, let us be so bold to confess our hypocrisies before God and a world that accuses, but then, let us be even bolder to hear and embrace Christ's amazing work on the cross, for we know that there is more forgiveness in Christ than there is hypocrisy in us. Yes, may we confess this day that there is no such thing as a perfect Christian but only forgiven Christians – forgiven Christians who have been freed from master sin and belong to God almighty.