

## ***“When Christians Get it Wrong—When Christians are UnChristian”***

Over the last 10 years or so, I've noticed that more and more people, particularly young adults, are increasingly frustrated with Christianity. Now, they're not necessarily frustrated with Jesus, they generally think that he had something going on and they're interested in him and his teachings. They just aren't very interested in Christianity. Gandhi once said to a pastor, "I love your Jesus; I just don't see many of your Christians who look like him." Maybe that's what some young people today are thinking.

40% of all 16-29 year olds have opted out of the church. 20% would say that they are agnostic, atheist or have no religion. The rest are spiritual, just not interested in Christianity. Some of that 40% are people you know...friends, your own kids, nieces, or nephews. It's important for us to figure out why they've opted out of the church.

You may be thinking, "Well when I was young, or went to college, I stopped going to church, but I came back." But it's not the same today, these young adults aren't just taking a break from church for a few years. Many of them are saying outright, "We reject Christianity. We don't necessarily reject Jesus, but we reject Christianity."

It's really important for us to listen, and hear, and understand, and see how we can go from getting it wrong, to getting right. And that's what we're going to do over the next few weeks. We're going to listen to people that have opted out of church and see what we might need to change; what we might need to do to get it right.

Last year I started reading a book based on a survey done in 2007 by the Barna Group. They're like the Gallup Poll agency except they focus on religious issues in America. David Kinnaman put that survey together into a book published last year called *Unchristian*. They focused their research on what they called outsiders—that is, young adults 16-29 who have opted out of Christianity. They not only looked at what was happening in with these trends, but why it was happening. We've got a clip of David Kinnaman summarizing why so many people are opting out of Christianity. Take a look. **[Kinnaman interview is available on YouTube]** Do you hear that last part? That should unsettle us. He said, "They reject Jesus and the church because they don't want to be associated with that kind of people." What kind of people? Well, the Christians they have known.

Here's where I want us to go in this series: I want us to see some of the roadblocks to Christ that people face—some of the roadblocks people have to claiming Christianity as their faith. We're going to look at what course corrections we might need to make personally, and if there is anything we need to do differently as a church so that we're not "those kind of Christians" that keep people from meeting Jesus.

Some of you here today might say, "Hey, I'm in that group. I'm that outsider to Christianity for those same reasons. I might be interested in Jesus, but I'm not sure." If that's you, I hope we remove some the roadblocks for you personally and you have a chance to give Christ a fair hearing so you can decide if you want to follow him.

Let's get a little more specific today by looking at one of the top reasons why so many people are repelled by Christianity. What Kinnaman did was put together a list of 24 adjectives that could be used to describe a religious faith. 12 were positive, 12 were negative. He gave these words to the people he was interviewing who were outsiders. They were asked to pick the words that best describe Christianity or Christians. The top 5 responses they gave were things you would not want to be associated with. The third most frequent response was chosen by 85% of the outsiders. It's that the Christians they've known are hypocrites. That's what I want to focus on today.

The word hypocrite comes right from the Greek language and its original meaning came from the theater. If you were an actor you were a hypocrite. Somebody who was pretending to be something else. It wasn't a bad term if you were an actor, but when Jesus used it he didn't mean it in a positive way. Every time he uses it he's talking about the religious leaders. He's saying that they are pretenders, just acting like people of God, but they had missed the point.

There are different kinds of hypocrisy too. Some of it does more damage than others. Some is pretty harmless. Like the guy who goes into a bar and orders three beers at one time. He sits there and drinks from all three. Every week at the same time he does the same thing. Orders three beers and wants them all at the same time. After a few weeks the bartender says to him. "You know, I can bring those to you one at time and they'll stay cold." The man says, "No. You see, I've got two brothers and we used to get together every week on this day and have a beer. They both moved away but we decided that on this day, at this time we'd keep our bond alive by doing this." The bartender was kind of moved by that.

The man kept this up for several months and then one day he walked in and ordered just 2 beers. The bartender knew what that meant. He brings the two beers and says, "I'm sorry about your loss. Which of your brothers died?" The man says, "Oh, nobody died. It's just that my wife and I joined the Baptist church last week and I had to give up drinking. But my brothers have no problem with it." That would be one form of hypocrisy, but I don't think that Jesus was thinking about that when he spoke so strongly about hypocrisy.

I think he was talking about people who say they're really serious Christians who go around telling other people how to be really serious Christians, but their lives just don't line up with that. Jesus was talking to people who, maybe because of their judgmentalism or the way they live out their faith, just make people feel small.

Listen to these two young people as they give their impression of Christians. Those are some hard words. The first girl talked about a friend of hers who claims to be a hard-core Christian who smokes weed, and drinks and lies. I'd guess that the problem she has with her friend isn't necessarily that he does all that stuff. It's that he claims to be a hard-core Christian and does all that stuff.

The second young woman talked about how the Christians she knew made other people feel small. Christians who didn't walk what they talked. That's the hypocrisy that Jesus was talking about. So what did Jesus say about hypocrisy? And is there anything he's saying to first century Christians that might apply to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians?

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said, **"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say, '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 the other person's eye" (Matthew 7:3, TNIV).**

Jesus is teaching that no one should be quick to point out other people's sins and shortcomings without taking a good hard look at their own. You see there's something here that Christians have to be very careful about. Here's how it can happen: You choose to follow Jesus and live out his life with yours. You realize that there are some things you don't want to do anymore. "My language isn't honoring to God so I'm going stop cussing." You work on that and before long, it's just not a problem anymore. You say, "I don't think getting drunk is honoring to God so I'm going stop getting drunk." Or I'm going to stop the gossip that I've fallen into. You work on it and overcome it. Maybe it's something else. And that's all great. And as you start to free yourself from those things you begin to notice other people who are still doing them. And as you notice everybody else who is still doing those things, you start to feel pretty good about yourself. You used to do those things but don't do them anymore. Then you find yourself having to tell somebody. "Have you noticed how much Bill drinks, and Sharon gossips, and Aaron swears?" And pretty soon the devil has you right where he wants you. Because he got you to trade one thing for another. He got you to trade cussing, or gossip, or whatever, for pride. And that's a winning proposition for him every time. Because as dangerous as those other things are, none of them is as dangerous to your soul as spiritual pride—believing that you are better than somebody else. Hypocrisy. Yes, we keep working on areas of our lives where we need to do better, but we also work hard at steering clear of spiritual pride. It's hypocrisy

There's a whole chapter of Matthew's gospel devoted hypocrisy—the 23 chapter. It's probably what he said in this chapter that got him killed. He's in the last week of his life and he is confronting the religious leaders—the Pharisees and the scribes. One verse after another he says, "Woe to you Pharisees, woe to

Scribes...” Here’s one small section: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. 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. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” (Matthew 23:23-24, TNIV).**

The Pharisees had an intricate set of laws that they lived by every day. Pharisee means one set apart. They wanted to be pure and it was good motivation—to be righteous in God’s eyes. They took the religious laws and carried them to even the smallest situation. Jesus gave the example of tithing. They didn’t just give 10% of their income, they would give every tenth basil leaf in their garden, every tenth sprig of dill they’d collect and offer to God. All that sounds good, but when all they focused on were the details, they forgot the really important stuff. They looked down on people who didn’t live up to their standards and wouldn’t associate with them. Anybody who didn’t believe like them was out. Other religious groups, the Sadducees were out, the Essenes were out. There was all this fighting among different groups about who got it and who didn’t, who was in and who was out.

Does that sound anything like Christianity today? In the U.S. today there are thousands of different denominations, and tens of thousands of non-denominational churches. We struggle with this and we start dissing other churches because they’ve got a different way of following Jesus, or of understanding scripture, or how they do baptism, they’re out! We tend to focus on the details, the minutia, and we forget that Jesus said that the world will know you my followers by how you love one another. Not in how you do communion, or baptism, or anything else. By how you love one another. How amazing is that?! We snipe and gripe about each other and call each other names, when Jesus called us to love one another. Is it any wonder that people think we’re hypocrites?

Jesus was saying to the Pharisees, “You’re great with the details, it’s awesome that you give a tenth of your herbs. But you’ve forgotten the weightier matters: justice, mercy, compassion. You got the externals right, but you forgot the internals; you forgot the most important parts.” That’s what Jesus meant when he said, **“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. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean” (Matthew 23:25, TNIV).** Jesus isn’t talking about doing dishes here. He’s talking about our tendency to focus on the superficial, to only allow our faith to go skin deep and never allow it to penetrate our hearts, our values, what we do when no one else is looking.

Let’s face it. It’s easy to be a Christian for an hour when you come here. You can look pious, I think I look pretty pious too. We can work on the externals, and some of them need to be worked on. But we can’t forget what’s most important, what’s going on on the inside. How we think, your values, how you care about the big issues in our world and the things that matter to God, and are you willing to change your lifestyle in order to make sure that people that don’t have anything to eat can eat. It’s that kind of stuff. And most of us are content with cleaning the outside of the cup and neglecting the inside. We have a world where 30,000 children die of malnutrition and related diseases every day and we’re worried about who’s listening to rock music, or going to an R rated movie,

I think that those who have given up on church have something to remind us of when it comes to living out a life of following Jesus. They’ve told us. 85% of them said that when they think of Christians they think of the word “hypocrite.” And they’re pointing to all the things we’re talking about today. Yes, they could probably tell you about a Christian they know who was getting it right. But they have a lot more stories of Christians getting it wrong. Christians who were self-righteous, judgmental, making other people feel small, narrow-minded, mean-spirited, looking more like Pharisees than the Jesus.

And listen, I’m a hypocrite. Because I know the person I want to be, and I’m not him. I want to be this person who never has a lustful thought, who is always loving all the time, who is patient, and caring, and concerned for everyone, whose heart breaks over tragedy, who is willing to sacrifice and give up lots of things in order to make sure other people have enough. I see this person who is wise, and bold, and courageous,

and always doing the right thing...except I'm not him yet. I want to be him, I work at being him, but I'm that man yet.

And watch this: In the research that David Kinnaman did he found that outsiders don't expect us to be perfect, they don't ask that of us. One person interviewed said, "It doesn't bother me that you Christians are hypocrites, we're all hypocrites. The problem for me is that I know I'm a hypocrite. And I'm not sure you do." People are not asking us to be perfect; they're asking us to be real. They want us to want to be who we say we are and try to make progress in that direction.

Check out one last passage. **"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"** (Luke 6:1, TNIV). That's what the religious authorities said about Jesus. He welcomes sinners and eats with them. People labeled as sinners were drawn to him. They were drawn to Jesus. He didn't make them feel small! He made them feel alive. He didn't condemn them. He didn't pick apart their lives. He could have done that, but he didn't. Instead when he talked to them about God and about life, it made them want to know more. And as he talked to them, they wanted to be more like him.

That's what he's looking for from us. When we love with his love, when we welcome people where they are, when we're authentic and real, when we encourage, people will be drawn to us and the Jesus we love and serve.

Pastor Adam Hamilton tells about a time when he and another staff member met at a local bar and grill for a staff meeting. It was late one night and they had both been busy, they were both night-owls and it was a good time and convenient place to meet. They're sitting there drinking their cokes and having appetizers. Adam has on his church sweatshirt. At one point the bartender comes up to him, not knowing he's the pastor of the church, and says, "I noticed your sweatshirt. Do you go to church there?" He said, "Yeah I do." She said, "Here's why I'm asking: My life isn't going very well right now. My marriage just fell apart. I've got a 3 year old little boy. I've been a pagan witch for the last 8 years and that's not doing anything for me. And if feel like I need something else in my life. But what I want to ask you is, do you think that church would welcome a single mom, who's been divorced, who's been a pagan witch for 8 years, and who works as a bartender?"

He said, "I can tell you without hesitation that the people of that church would welcome you with open arms and they would love you and would not feel small there." She came the next Sunday and started her faith journey.

So I have to ask you this question: Are we the kind of church that's going to welcome people whose lives are falling apart? Women in the midst of a divorce, who have been pagan witches for 8 years, who are working as bartenders?

I don't mean to be melodramatic, but if you're not that kind of church, I don't want to be your pastor.

I think these 40% of young adults who've opted out of church, I think they really matter to God. I think he really cares about them, and I want us to figure out how to be the kind of Christians that when they see us, they say, "I want to know more about him, about that Jesus." And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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