

Text: Matthew 7.21-27  
St Stephen's

Sept 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004  
Sun AM

## Isn't The Church Full of Hypocrites?

### Tough Questions Series...

#### **How can a Loving God Allow Suffering?**

Suffering is the question with no easy answers. But we found that God gives us lighthouses in the storm of suffering, that will guide us safely through that dangerous storm if we trust and follow their light. We listened to Corrie Ten Boom writes these words while setting in a Nazi concentration camp, *"No matter how deep our darkness, God is deeper still."*

#### **Doesn't Evolution Disprove God?**

We looked at two answers to the question of our origin, the answer of Darwinism and the answer of intelligent design. We found that there is good reason to take a fresh look at the evidence and to forge a new partnership between science and faith. As Francis Bacon said it, *"A little science estranges a man from God. A lot of science brings him back."*

### Today our question gets a little personal:

#### **"Isn't The Church Full of Hypocrites?"**

Many people who ask this question are thinking of **historic failures**... Atheist Ken Schei:

*"Christianity has (by certain people) been used throughout history as an excuse for some of the most brutal, heartless, and senseless atrocities known to man: the Crusades; the Inquisitions; the witch burnings... I did not see much in Christianity worth having."*

One of history's most famous atheists, Bertrand Russell, saw it like this...

*"As soon as absolute truth is supposed to be contained in the sayings of a certain man, [his followers] acquire power, since they hold the key to truth. Like any other privileged caste, they use their power to their own advantage... They become necessarily opponents of all intellectual and moral progress."*

Most people who ask the hypocrisy question, however, are thinking of **personal failures...** Jimmy Swaggert, Jim Baker, and a small section of Catholic clergy quickly come to mind. They are thinking of what is called the “**Integrity Gap**”... You know what the integrity gap is. It is **the difference between what you do and what you say**. The gap between what you say you believe and how you really live. It is measured most honestly not by what you do when everyone is looking – which is your reputation – but by what you do when no one is looking.

**George Gallup did a survey** on this and discovered a large integrity gap in America. 80% of Americans admit to driving while drunk, 35% confess to overstating tax deductions, 75% have taken office supplies for personal use. The list is long, and the percentages are high. White collar crime in America is estimated to generate 10 times the loss that is generated by street crime. When Gallup factored in the faith of people who responded to his survey, he found that *“those who attend church or synagogue appear only slightly more likely to walk the straight and narrow than their less pious compatriots.”*

## Why Do We Have an “Integrity Gap”?

- **Because we have high standards**

The gap wouldn't be so large if God's standards weren't so high. Jesus said that we should “be perfect, like his Father is perfect.” Pretty easy to fall short of that. But God isn't going to lower the standards. Paul said,

*“God decided that those who came to Him - should become like his Son.”* Rom 8:29 (The Living Bible)

Nothing less will satisfy God.

- **Because we stop growing**

My concern late last year that our church had plateaued. I felt God challenging me. “Will you settle for this?” Churches plateau because people plateau. We settle in. Get comfortable. We begin to take grace for granted. Loose our edge. Stop taking risks. We plateau. In reality there is no such thing as a plateau. A spiritual plateau is just a brief pause while we stand on a tipping point. Very quickly we will either start growing again or we will start backsliding. God does not want us to stop growing. Not now, not ever.

*the godly will flourish like palm trees...*

*they are transplanted into the Lord's own house...  
Even in old age they will still produce fruit;  
they will remain vital and green.*  
Psa 92:12-14 (NLT)

- **Because it's easy**

You have to agree, it is hard to fight what is evil. It is much easier to just drift along.

*"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."*

Rom 7:18

We get paralyzed by our fears, paralyzed by our own weaknesses and lack of courage. It is just a lot easier to go along and not put up a fight.

- **Because we think we don't need help**

We think we can do it alone. Both Jimmy Swaggert and Jim Baker gave up relationships where they allowed others to hold them accountable. They thought they didn't need it any more.

*First pride, then the crash—  
the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.*

Pro 16:18 (The Message)

No one does the Christian life alone. Everyone needs a team. Everyone needs some friends that celebrate your greatest strengths and help you with your greatest weaknesses. Everyone needs help.

## **How Do You Close The Integrity Gap?**

### **1) Be Quick to Confess**

There is hardly anyone less attractive than the Christian who believes that they are better than everyone else, who always talk about the failures of others, and never seem to be able to admit to any failures of their own.

There is probably no one more attractive than the Christian who has some real humility about themselves, knows that they make mistakes, and is quick to say their apologies. John says,

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins*

*and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

1 John 1.8-10

Failures happen among Christians. As we embrace the higher standards of Christlikeness, we become more sensitive to our shortcomings – not less so. So **let's be honest about it**. And humble about it. And quick to say the apologies that need to be said.

I AM A CHRISTIAN By Maya Angelou

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I'm not shouting "I'm clean livin."  
I'm whispering "I was lost,"  
Now I'm found and forgiven.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I don't speak of this with pride.  
I'm confessing that I stumble  
and need CHRIST to be my guide.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I'm not trying to be strong.  
I'm professing that I'm weak  
and need HIS strength to carry on.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I'm not bragging of success.  
I'm admitting I have failed  
and need God to clean my mess.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I'm not claiming to be perfect,  
My flaws are far too visible  
but, God believes I am worth it.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I still feel the sting of pain,  
I have my share of heartaches

So I call upon His name.

When I say... "I am a Christian"  
I'm not holier than thou,  
I'm just a simple sinner  
who received God's good grace, somehow.

## 2) **Step Out in Compassion**

There was no greater mark of the early Christians than their love for each other and their compassion for people who were hurting. In a short period of time they established ministries to the ill, the aged, the children, and the infirm as **an essential part** of Christian care and outreach. Hospitals, ministries of mercy and compassion, and widespread educational efforts, all combined to open new opportunities to the masses of the world. Almost all of them **sprouted forth from Gospel seeds...**

*If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear. My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love.*

1 John 3.17-18

Helping people who have been flooded.

## 3) **Live Consistent With the Truth**

Jesus expected that there would be an integrity gap in his church...

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*

Matt 7.21

It is easier to talk a good game than to live a real life. But not very people are impressed.

A few years ago Forbes Mag did a poll...

<b>Which of the following would you most like to be known for?</b>	
<b>Being authentic</b>	<b>49.8%</b>
Being intelligent	22.2
Your sense of humor	22.0
Being good-looking	1.6

Which of the following qualities do you or did you insist that <b>the person you</b> spend your life with possess?	
<b>Authentic</b>	<b>60.8%</b>
Intelligent	24.0
Witty	5.5
Good-looking	3.1

**Francis Schaeffer** had been a pastor and a missionary for over 10 years when he faced a crisis of faith. He was frustrated by the lack of spiritual authenticity in the lives of so many Christians that he knew, including himself. He went into retreat. *“I walked in the mountains when it was clear,”* he said, *and when it was rainy I walked backward and forward in the hayloft”* where he lived. Walking and praying, we went over all the basic questions again until he settled them in his heart with God. After coming to a new confidence of the truth of the Bible and of God’s claim over every part of his life, **he began to pray that the Gospel would become authentic in his own life.** Authentic. Real. In his own life. He **wanted his life to speak of Jesus...** of Jesus’ death... of Jesus’ resurrection... and passion, and purpose, and mercy, and character, and mind...

**Have you ever prayed like that?** It was after those months that Schaeffer began a ministry to disaffected and searching students in his little Swiss chalet – a ministry that was marked by lives consistent with God’s truth, and that would eventually penetrate the fortresses of Western thought. That is the power of a life lived consistent with the truth of Jesus.

#### 4) **Seek the Power to Change**

Paul warned about

*having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

2 Tim 3.5

He was talking about religious hypocrisy. Looking good on the outside and being empty on the inside. It is easy to do. Before Jesus started into

ministry, John the Baptist paved his way with some very direct words about authenticity.

*It's your life that must change, not your skin! ...Is it green and blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire.*

*(Jesus) will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out.*

Matt 3.8,10,11

There is such a hunger for more of God's power and presence. We had about 120 people in our first Life in the Spirit seminar last Wednesday. People who are hungry for rivers of living water flowing through them, hungry for the life of God and the power of God, who can't live without His Spirit full and overflowing. Why don't you come and join us?

Nancy Pearcey in her excellent book, *Total Truth*, says that "In a world full of spin and hype, the postmodern generation is searching for something real and authentic."

Multitudes share their hunger. So do we. We are hungry for lives rooted in Jesus, **God-Changed Lives** that are faithful to him, consistent with him, marked by his character, overflowing with his love.

Don't you honestly want a life just like that? So do I.