

False Accusations of Hypocrisy [Slide 1]

Sometimes the world accuses the church of hypocrisy when the church is not being hypocritical. Last week I talked about hypocrisy and said that hypocrisy is a universal problem showing up everywhere, including the church. Further, I said that religious people are especially susceptible to hypocrisy because the central message of our faith teaches that we should be good, loving, honorable people like our Lord and when we fail to reach that ideal we often pretend we are better than we actually are. So I am not disputing the fact that sometimes the world has a legitimate criticism about hypocrisy in the church. However there are times when the world wrongly accuses Christians of hypocrisy because the world either doesn't understand what the Bible teaches or it uses different definitions than the Bible uses.

[Slide 2] Today I want to provide some examples where the world is flat out wrong when it accuses us of hypocrisy. A lot of the time the world accuses us of hypocrisy when we speak out on moral issues and say things they don't agree with. One of the key accusations is that we are wrong to label certain actions as morally wrong because then we are judging people and the Bible teaches that we should not judge lest we be judged. We are accused of being judgmental and of being hypocrites because on the one hand we claim to defend Biblical truth but on the other hand we deny it by judging other people.

For example, if we say that homosexual behavior is sinful and disobedient to God, then we are wrongly judging people. If we say that abortion is the moral equivalent of murdering a baby, then we are being judgmental. If we say that the only way people can be saved is through Jesus Christ we are being narrow-minded and intolerant. If we treat a transgendered person as their original gender at birth and refuse to let them use the opposite bathroom then we are being judgmental. In our culture, there are a number of things we can make judgments about and be okay. I'll talk about those in a minute. But if we speak against moral behaviors that society and particularly social liberals accept, then we're not okay.

[Slide 3] Let's look first at the Scripture most people are referring to when they say Christians should not judge. Look at Matthew 7:1-6 in your Bible or on the sermon outline. Verse 1 is widely quoted as a blanket prohibition against all judging. Verse 1 says, "Read." Read it in isolation, it sounds like a blanket prohibition against all judging. But let's read the whole context. Let's read verses 2-6. Read. Verse 2 warns that you will be judged by others by the same standard of judgment you use. According to verses 3-4 you should not judge others when you have not solved the same problem yourself. In other words, you should first judge yourself before you judge anyone else.

But then we get to verse 5. First take the log out of your own eye and then you can see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Jesus does not say you should never try to take the speck out of your brother's eye. He says you should not judge him until you have successfully removed the same problem in your own life. It turns out that Matthew 7:1 is not a blanket prohibition against judging. It is a warning to not judge hypocritically someone for the same problem you have not fixed in yourself.

Then in verse 6 Jesus says do not give holy things to dogs and do not throw your pearls before swine. Is he talking about literal dogs and pigs? No, he is talking about people, who like dogs and pigs, see no value in spiritual truths that are precious to you. How do you know who is a dog or a pig? You have to judge the person based on their past behavior, that this is a person

who will ridicule or mock the precious truths you might share with them. Far from forbidding judging, Jesus actually asks you to judge people in verse 6.

[Slide 4] What is judging? Judging is when you compare a behavior, an action, a deed or a person against some standard to determine whether it or he meets that standard or not. In a courtroom a judge or a jury determines whether a person has broken the standard of the law. In the example Jesus gave in Matthew 7:6 the standard is whether a person will value and respect spiritual things. If they won't, then you don't share with them.

[Slide 5] All of us judge all the time. We judge who to vote for. We judge whether we like a restaurant's food. We judge whether to share confidential information with someone. We judge who to let babysit our children. We judge who we will let be our doctor, our dentist, and our optometrist. We judge whether we will donate to an organization or not. We judge the veracity of what we hear on the news, on social media, on TV ads. We judge what bank to use, where to shop for our groceries, and what cell phone company to use. We use various standards of judgment; either the doctor with the best patient manner or the cheapest one or maybe a combination of both. It's either the grocery store closest to us, or the one with the best selection of meat, or the one that has the best coupons. We make many judgments every day based on various standards and most of the time no one gives a second thought about it and no one trots out Matthew 7:1 and says you can't judge. You can hardly make a decision without some kind of judgment.

[Slide 6] Political liberals control the news media, the entertainment media, most of higher education, and much of government. What that means is that you are free to judge if your judgment agrees with the prevailing liberal consensus and you are not free to judge if your judgment disagrees with the prevailing liberal consensus.

[Slide 7] For example the liberal consensus is that sexual harassment is wrong. That's what the me too movement is all about. I agree with that consensus. You are free to judge Harvey Weinstein or Kevin Spacey for mistreating women or men and using their position to exact sexual favors. My standard is the Biblical teaching that sex outside of marriage is wrong and treating people made in the image of God with disrespect is wrong. So I agree with the liberal judgment on this matter although I'm not sure what their standard is because I suspect it's not the Bible.

[Slide 8] Right now the prevailing liberal consensus is that racial discrimination is wrong. You are free to call out racism in its various forms and the culture will support your judgment. I believe that liberal consensus is also correct because we are all made in the image of God and we are called to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

[Slide 9] In our culture you are allowed and even encouraged to judge people for being sex traffickers, climate polluters, for being intolerant of others, or for being homophobic. No one pulls out Matthew 7:1 if you judge others for things with which the prevailing culture agrees.

[Slide 10] However, if you should say that homosexual behavior is sinful and that it should not be sanctioned in marriage, if you should say that abortion is wrong and morally evil, if you should say that the military should not pay for transgender operations, then you are being judgmental and a hypocrite because didn't Jesus say that Christians should not judge others?

[Slide 11] Turns out that the greatest hypocrites are those who would deny that Christians can make any kind of moral judgments because then we would be imposing our religious beliefs on others when it is perfectly acceptable and even encouraged for non-religious people to impose their beliefs on others. The truth is that everyone is trying to persuade or impose their moral

beliefs on others. The only question is what morality gets imposed and what is the basis for that morality?

[Slide 12] A Christian's morality is based on the Bible accurately interpreted and applied. The Bible has been a basis of morality for 2000 years. What is the secular morality based on and why should we give it a hearing? Here is the confusing thing for me. I don't know what the secular morality is based on. I don't know what qualifies it to earn our respect.

Is the secular morality based on the idea that we should not hurt someone, kind of a secular idea that you love your neighbor as yourself? That doesn't seem to be the case. It is not the case in abortion where the harm of the baby being killed far outweighs the inconvenience and distress to the mother in keeping the child. That did not seem to be the case when Christian florists and cake bakers were so fined and threatened as to lose their businesses when they would not directly support a gay marriage. In that case the gay couple had recourse to other businesses that would serve them so they were only inconvenienced to the extent that they needed to call someone else to bake their wedding cake or provide flowers for their wedding. The harm was far more on the conscientious Christians than on the gay couple. Morality was then imposed lethally on the unborn child and overwhelmingly on the Christian business people. Our prevailing culture does not seem to think that imposition of morality is a bad thing. Remember those cases the next time someone blathers about how wrong it is to impose one's morality on someone else. Understand clearly that all law is an imposition of morality on someone. The only questions are: Whose morality is being imposed and what is the source of that morality?

Most of the time when the world accuses Christians of being hypocrites because we are judging, that criticism itself is hypocritical because everyone judges.

[Slide 13] A second false accusation of hypocrisy is when the world says that we are being unloving because we refuse to morally accept certain practices. Here the problem exists because the world has a different definition for love than we do, and yet they try to judge us by their definition. The world believes that love means that we morally accept a person for who they are especially when they appear not to have a choice in the matter. According to them, it is not loving to make a person feel bad about themselves. This is the concept of love the world brings to the topics of homosexuality and transgender individuals.

[Slide 14] We reject that definition of love. Instead, I would propose that love really means doing what is best for a person where best is defined by God. Love can never be divorced from truth. I'm going to read Paul's great description of love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13:4-7. Read. This is a pretty comprehensive description of love, but I would point out to you two essential qualities of love in verse 6. True love does not rejoice in unrighteousness (as God defines unrighteousness) and true love rejoices with the truth (both reality and the moral truth found in the Bible.) The secular world takes neither of these qualities into account in its definition of love. The secular world divorces its definition of love from God's truth and thus what it calls love is actually an aberration.

[Slide 15] By the Biblical definition of love, true love cannot exist in a homosexual relationship because homosexual behavior is not the righteousness of God. If I encourage someone to pursue that kind of relationship, I am not loving them because my own encouragement does not flow out of the righteousness of God. In fact, I am doing the exact opposite of love if I encourage a gay marriage. I am not loving them, because I am not desiring God's best for them. I'm compromising. I'm speaking falsehood to them, perhaps because I don't want to hurt their feelings, rather than speaking truth because the truth will probably be painful for me to speak and painful for them to hear.

[Slide 16] By the same reasoning, you are not loving a person who feels like they were born in the wrong body and that they ought to be the opposite gender of their birth gender if you encourage them to transition. True love rejoices in the truth and the biological reality is the truth. Their feelings are the problem. Their feelings are out of sync with reality. When a person is not in touch with reality, they have a mental health problem. The solution is not to redefine reality or to try to mask the truth proclaimed by every single chromosome in the body by using hormones and reconstructive surgery. The solution is to deal with the defective feelings and the wrong thinking that feeds those feelings. That is the loving thing to do. The loving thing is not to help them deny the truth.

[Slide 17] Sin has affected every part of us, including our self-perception and our desires. God does not make a person a homosexual nor does he make a person the wrong gender. I understand that these individuals did not choose to feel this way. I get that. We are the result of both the work of God in our lives as well as the corrupting influence of sin. When part of us does not match God's truth or God's righteousness, that part is not the work of God. It is the result of sin that has corrupted the whole human race.

[Slide 18] We are not being unloving by proclaiming God's truth. It is the world that is actually being unloving by promoting that which is not righteous or true. If we're going to have a dialogue on this topic it needs to begin with the definition of love. What is love? Where do we get that definition? Can that definition be consistently applied in all cases? I think you will see that the Biblical definition of love is the only one that can be consistently applied.

[Slide 19] I will address one other case in which the world falsely accuses the church of hypocrisy. It is in the area of how much money we spend on our buildings versus the amount of money we give to the poor. The argument is that if we were really following God's priorities we would be spending most of our money on helping the poor and little on our buildings which primarily benefit us. Even Christians think along these lines.

I'm going to argue that we are hypocrites only if we are way out balance, giving very little to help others while putting most of our money into our facilities.

[Slide 20] First, what do we see in Scripture about the balance between helping others and spending on a building? In the OT God made numerous provisions for the poor. Every third year the people paid a 10% tax on income for the poor. Farmers were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested for the poor to glean. People were encouraged to donate to the poor. The Law prohibited taking interest from the poor and required the poor to be paid their wages immediately.

However when it came time to build the tabernacle and later the Temple, God prescribed gold plated poles, tables, altars, and utensils, and fine curtains and coverings for the transport of the holy items. Solomon's Temple was evidently a magnificent structure before it was destroyed as was also Herod's Temple that was destroyed by the Romans.

[Slide 21] When we get to the Gospels we come across a story where a Mary, Martha's sister, poured very expensive perfume over Jesus' feet. That story is in John 12:1-8 on your sermon outline or you can follow in your Bible. Let's read it.

Even though Judas' motives were evil in this case, nevertheless he raised a good question. Wouldn't it have been better to sell that perfume and use the money to help the poor? It's a good, pragmatic question because Mary was benefitting only one person, Jesus, and she wasn't even meeting an essential need, whereas she could have met the essential needs of many poor people.

Jesus however, disagrees first because of the timing. He is about to die and there would be no other opportunities to honor him. She should keep the rest of it for his burial. Then he says “the poor you always have with you, but you will not always have me.” The poor will always exist and will always need help and you will always be able to help them, but in this case the better choice was to honor and bless Jesus.

What I take from Jesus’ words is that it is appropriate and sometimes the more important thing to use our money to glorify or honor God. Both are important. We do have an obligation to care for the poor with our money. We also have an obligation or privilege to worship God with our money.

[Slide 22] The instructions for how the tabernacle was to be built indicate that how we construct our sacred spaces says something about God and is a way to honor God. For example you can visit Europe and see all these massive cathedrals built with very high ceilings, stained glass windows, and stone columns. They were built to emphasize the transcendence and greatness of God. Their lavish structures were designed to impress the worshipper with the idea that God deserves the very best. The building itself is an act of worship.

That is why church buildings cannot be judged by the same standards as other buildings because church buildings say something about God. Consider this: If the government buildings and universities and corporate buildings in a city are all fabulous, beautiful, awe-inspiring structures and then the churches are all second-rate, built out of inferior materials, lacking in aesthetic appeal, what does that communicate about God? Probably not a message we want to communicate.

There is no easy answer as to how much a congregation should invest in its facilities and how much it should spend on ministry and outreach. I think each congregation has to chart its own way, seeking God’s direction. I don’t think we are in any position to judge another church as to whether their facilities are too extreme or not, because we can’t judge how much that facility represented a desire to worship and honor God. Even more so, the world has no standing to judge the church as to how we apportion our money between worship and ministry.

[Slide 23] I’m sure we can always do better. I think we at Hope could give more to benevolence and community outreach. We can try to increase the utilization of our building so that we are even a better steward of what God has given us. We have recently gotten out of debt and if we can move forward in the future without having to borrow money so that we don’t have to pay interest, I think that is a very good thing. Now that we have paid off the mortgage we should start donating to the building fund so that when the time comes to finish out our unfinished spaces, we don’t have to borrow to do that.

[Slide 24] Those outside the church who criticize the church for not giving more to the poor should first look to themselves. Syracuse University Professor Arthur Brooks published the book *Who Really Cares: The Surprising Truth About Compassionate Conservatism*. These were some of his findings. Religious Americans are far more likely to be generous to the downtrodden than secular progressives. Religious Americans give four times as much to charity each year than secular people and are 23 times likelier to volunteer to help people than folks who never attend church. Religious people also donate twice as much blood as do their non-religious counterparts. Nonreligious people may not be spending their money on a church building, but neither are they giving their money to the poor. Until non-religious people even match religious people in terms of giving to the poor, they really don’t have any platform to accuse us of hypocrisy.

[Slide 25] As I pointed out last week, we are not free of hypocrisy, but at least in these three areas I have discussed today, we are not hypocrites. We take our cues from the Bible and the world does not and because of that they will at times judge us by their standards. We need to challenge their standards. Do they have any moral basis other than their personal opinion for what they believe and do they live by their own standards? Let's pray.