

ARM Prison Outreach International

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SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH -- WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" -- PART 2

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 11th email message of 2008 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. This month's message is the second of eight to be sent in the next few months. Larry Farthing, my older brother, deals with some crucial issues for the church and its reputation in each community. In this age of rapid change, a deteriorating culture, and expanding technology, IS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST PUTTING IT'S BEST "NEW TESTAMENT FOOT" FORWARD? It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach, lead, and encourage. May God bless your labors!

-- Rod Farthing,

Development Director

SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT"

#2: "You're Hypocritical: You Don't Live the Teachings of Jesus"

INTRO:

A thorough study of surveys of non-Christians among the new generation of adults done by various groups from 1995 to 2007 has revealed some interesting insights into what they think about Christianity and the church.

Needless to say, they're pretty critical. We live in a pretty critical, opinionated world. One of the criticisms leveled at today's Christians is that we're, by and large, "hypocrites": we don't live the teachings of Jesus.

I read of a Muslim who said, similarly, "Your Jesus, he is so wonderful, but you Christians, you are not like him."

Hypocrisy, by and large, is inconsistency. The Bible points out at least eight ways we can be inconsistent in our Christianity:

1. Seeing fault in others without acknowledging our own faults. Jesus said in Matthew 7:3, "*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*"
2. Claiming Jesus is our Lord and not being obedient to Him. Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "*Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?*"
3. Living by the letter of the law while ignoring the principle. Jesus said in John 7:23,

“Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?”

4. **Being judgmental about something you are guilty of yourself.** Paul wrote in Romans 2:1, ***“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”***
5. **Not practicing what we preach.** Paul also wrote in Romans 2:21, ***“You, then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?”***
6. **Not living according to our profession.** Paul wrote in Titus 1:16, ***“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.”***
7. **Words without loving action.** James wrote, ***“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”*** (James 2:15, 16)
8. **Being double tongued.** Again, James says, in 3:10, ***“Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.”***

Amazingly enough, the younger generations of adults aren’t all that bent out of shape about the hypocrisy they see. They have come to expect it. They see hypocrisy as a fact of life – something that everybody is guilty of. They don’t see it as just a “Christian” thing; they see it as a common thing in our image-driven, self-oriented society. By and large, their attitude is: “Everybody does it. Get over it.”

However, it provides “outsiders” with a handy excuse for dealing with the evangelistic efforts of Christians. Both non-Christians and Christians who have dropped out of the church often use the excuse that they’ve encountered too much hypocrisy among Christians.

More importantly, hypocrisy among professed believers prevents the message of Christ from getting through. In Jesus’ day, it was the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders that hindered God’s message. He addressed them and their hypocrisy in Matthew 23. He said, ***“Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness”*** (v. 28). He said, ***“You are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are filthy – full of greed and self-indulgence”*** (v. 25). He said, ***“You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You won’t go in yourselves, and you don’t let others enter either”*** (v. 13). The hypocrisy of professed believers prevents those outside the church from hearing God’s message for their lives.

In addition, outsiders are hard-pressed to see any difference between them and us. Studies have revealed that when asked to identify their actions over the last thirty days, professed born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit a pornographic website, to take something that didn’t belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to consume enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to use an illegal, nonprescription drug, to say something

that was not true, to get back at someone for something he or she did, and to say mean things behind another person's back (*Unchristian*, p. 47).

So, what should we do about it? How should we respond to our accusers? What can we do to remedy the situation?

First of all,

WE CAN "CLEAN UP OUR ACT."

Needless to say, way too many of us are giving "outsiders" a less than ideal example to follow.

A recent survey reveals some surprising things about Christians over 42 years of age:

- 33% of us believe it's morally acceptable for unmarried people to live together.
- 23% believe sex outside marriage is all right.
- 17% of us believe it's okay to use profanity.
- 13% believe it's okay to get drunk.
- 19% of us think it's morally all right to view porn.
- 27% believe it's okay to have an abortion.
- 13% of us consider homosexuality morally acceptable.

As I've already pointed out, "outsiders" don't see any significant difference between their lifestyle and ours. There should be, shouldn't there?

Among young Christians 23-41 years of age:

- 59% believe cohabitation is morally acceptable.
- 44% believe sex outside of marriage is okay.
- 37% believe profanity is morally acceptable.
- 35% believe it's all right for a Christian to get drunk.
- 33% believe watching porn is morally acceptable.
- 32% think it's okay to have an abortion.
- 28% believe a homosexual relationship is morally acceptable.

Do you agree that we Christians need to "clean up our act"?

Second,

WE CAN CHANGE OUR MESSAGE OF WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT.

In a sense, we have brought the charge of hypocrisy upon ourselves. We have communicated, more than anything else about Christianity, that it is a lifestyle – a religion of rules and regulations. Outsiders have gotten this message – and they have measured us by those rules and regulations!

When Christian adults were asked to identify the priorities Christians pursue in terms of their personal faith, the response most often given was “being good, doing the right thing, not sinning” (*Unchristian*, p. 49).

However, the Christian lifestyle, people, is the *end product* of Christianity – what it looks like when it has reached maturity! Few of us, if any, have made it to that point! We are all “in process.” However, this is not what we have been communicating to “outsiders.”

We should be communicating to “outsiders” that *“We Christians are sinners who have begun a relationship with God through Jesus, His Son. We aren’t yet what we’re going to be, but, by the grace of God, we aren’t what we used to be.”*

Third,

WE CAN BE MORE TRANSPARENT AND ACKNOWLEDGE OUR INCONSISTENCIES.

Because we have made a sinless lifestyle somewhat the measurement as to whether a person is a Christian or not, we have put pressure on ourselves to appear righteous. We feel we must give a pretense of holiness. We try to project a “got-it-together” image. This is hypocrisy.

One survey found that the quality most admired by young people is authenticity or “doing what you say you are going to do.” This is *transparency*.

Transparency is merely admitting that we are exactly what the Bible says we are: wretched sinful people who need God to forgive us and rescue us. But “outsiders” have come to believe that Christians are straight-laced Bible-carriers who adhere to rigid rules and strict standards. They hear us condemn their lifestyle or their practices, but they don’t feel the love.

In his book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, Philip Yancey writes:

“Having spent time around ‘sinners’ and also around purported saints, I have a hunch why Jesus spent so much time with the former group: I think he preferred their company. Because the sinners were honest about themselves and had no pretense, Jesus could deal with them. In contrast, the saints put on airs, judged him, and sought to catch him in a moral trap. In the end it was the saints, not the sinners, who arrested Jesus” (p. 249).

Jesus said of these “saints” in Matthew 23:4, *“They crush people with impossible religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden.”*

CONCLUSION:

Let me recap what we can do to address the skepticism of the younger generations:

1. WE CAN CLEAN UP OUR ACT;
 2. WE CAN CORRECT THE MESSAGE OF WHAT CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT; AND
 3. WE CAN BE MORE TRANSPARENT AND ADMIT OUR SHORTCOMINGS.
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Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B

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In 2007, ARM donated almost 40,000 FREE Bible courses to prisoners!