

Your Spirit-Fueled Response to Christians Behaving Badly

When someone complains about Christians behaving badly, a common response is to admonish them to look to Jesus rather than to human beings. That's good advice, but it doesn't go far enough. Often you and I are the only Jesus others will see. So what do we do about Christians behaving badly?

You could probably list your own examples, but here are some situations I know personally:

- The church deacon who drinks his Friday night away and is noticed by a teenager from his church who then walks away from God for decades
- The small-church pastor who has an affair with a member of his church
- The Bible teacher who sexually harasses coworkers and students, thinking he can get away with it
- The board of a Christian non-profit who spends donors' money to purchase extravagant motorcycles for an elaborate vacation
- The leadership in a well-known Christian organization refusing to follow through on written commitments to clients

The examples I've listed above all relate to those in Christian leadership. But what of those individual believers who name the name of Christ but who cheat their employees, employers and customers, molest children, verbally abuse family members and others, perpetrate violence or habitually lie and steal?

To use James' comment from a different context, "My brothers, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). It's no wonder some enjoy throwing "hypocrite" around as both an excuse and a weapon.

But instead of cursing the darkness, let's light a candle.

So what do we do about Christians behaving badly?

Accept No Excuses

We're not talking about perfection here; we all need continuing forgiveness and transformation through Christ. But being a believer means something. If you name the name of Christ, what you do and say impacts the kingdom of God. Paul lists a whole range of evils the Corinthian believers had been engaged in previously, and then comments, "Such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11). But you're not that way any longer.

Don't use others' bad behavior as an excuse for yours. Remember, they won't be judging you in the end; you will stand before God alone, just you and Him. And it's not about wondering whether you were ready to become a Christian; God accepts you just as you are—always. He wants you!

Some of you may immediately feel waves of guilt; I'm probably not talking to you. I'm talking to those who are still doing the same sinful behaviors months, years, decades later, and *doing nothing about it*. Jesus loves repeat sinners! But He doesn't intend for you to stay the same. Get serious with God. If the Holy Spirit has put His finger on something in your life and said, "Here, let Me have this!"—let Him have it! Do whatever it takes. Grab hold of God's grace and let it radically transform you from the inside out. And don't rest until you experience that transformation.

Check Your Own Wake

Dr. Henry Cloud talks about the wake we each leave behind us, as the wake of a boat. What is the impact of your life on others? What would others think of Jesus if you were the only Christian they knew? Is your life as a whole making Jesus attractive?

Get off the perfection track, OK? It's not about you! It's

about the affect you are having on others for the kingdom of God. Get to the point of doing the right thing because it's the right thing regardless of the cost to you, and regardless of whether or not anyone else sees you. Remember, the Lord does see you. But even beyond Him, who you are impacts others.

Not pleased with what kind of advertisement you are for the kingdom of God? Do something about it. If you mess up, receive God's forgiveness and move on. This is not about presenting a falsely good persona or wallowing in self-hatred. It's about noticing the influence of your life on others—spouse, family, friends, coworkers, clients and more—and changing where you need to.

Hold Others Accountable

It's never OK to excuse bad behavior in others because they are Christians. Yes, we must treat our leaders and fellow believers with Christian love and grace, but that does not mean allowing bad behavior to continue without consequences.

An employee, Christian or not, must be held to whatever level of competence and skills their position requires. A pastor who has an affair must be removed from leadership until a serious process of healing and restoration has taken place. A business leader who lies or cheats must face whatever legal or personal consequences their behavior demands. A board, staff or public figure should be held to a higher standard as a Christian.

Politics, people-pleasing and ego are hard to eliminate, but we must do all we can to keep those selfish elements out of how we hold others accountable. The standard is not perfection; the standard is integrity, honesty, growth, and a commitment to function in a Christlike way in every dimension of life, business, family or ministry.

Does that sound like an impossible way to live? Not at all. No one who came into Jesus' presence could have doubted that he/she was loved and accepted without having to earn it. But

they would also have been absolutely certain that they could not stay in His presence and remain the same. Just being with Jesus called each person to a higher life, to radical change.

Isn't that how any true change happens? Stay in His presence long enough, and you will become like Him (2 Cor. 3:18).

So get in His presence often. Keep coming back. Spend time there. You won't be able to stay the same. And your transformation will call others to that journey as well.

Your Turn: *What kind of advertisement for the kingdom of God are you? How might you need to hold those around you accountable for their behavior also? Leave a comment below.*
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