Are Christians Hypocrites?

Foreword
A Biblical Look at Striving and Failure

People often call Christians hypocrites. The charge usually comes when believers fall short of the moral standards they talk about in public. At first glance, the criticism seems fair. Christians claim to follow a high standard, yet they still sin, struggle, and fail. The New Testament, however, gives a clearer picture of what is actually happening. When we look at what hypocrisy really means, how sanctification works, the ongoing fight between the soul and the flesh, Jesus' words about the Pharisees, and the rest of New Testament teaching, **a different conclusion emerges**.

Definition of a Hypocrite:
What Hypocrisy Actually Means

Hypocrisy is not simply making a mistake or failing to live up to an ideal. The word comes from the Greek term for a stage actor who performed behind a mask. In the New Testament, it means deliberately putting on a religious appearance that doesn't match the heart, especially to look good to others. Jesus warned, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others" (**Matthew 6:5**). He later said the scribes and Pharisees were "like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness" (**Matthew 23:27**). **Real hypocrisy is performance without transformation**—an outward show that hides an unchanged life.

The Lifelong Process of Sanctification

Sanctification is the process by which God progressively conforms believers to Christ's image. It is not an instantaneous achievement completed at conversion but a lifelong work. Scripture states, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (**1 Thessalonians 4:3)**. Paul assures the Philippians that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 1:6**). Until that day, the Christian lives in the tension between what has already been accomplished in Christ and what has not yet been fully realized in experience. **The process itself guarantees that the believer will repeatedly fall short of the standard he or she professes.**

Soul Striving to Be More Christlike, Whereas the Flesh Fights Back.

Within that regenerative process, a constant struggle remains. The renewed soul wants to be more Christlike, but the remaining flesh pushes back. Paul described the experience plainly: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. \ldots Wretched man that I am!" (**Romans 7:19, 24**). He explained the reason: "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other" (**Galatians 5:17**). The Christian therefore lives with an internal conflict. The desire to obey is real; so is the resistance. This is not evidence that the person is faking faith. **It is the ordinary experience of someone who has been made new yet still battles old habits and desires**.

In the Strive, One Seeks to Be, but Is Not

Because the work is unfinished and lifelong, the believer is always seeking to become what he or she is not yet fully. Paul put it this way: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own" (**Philippians 3:12**). The language of pressing on admits the present shortfall. John added that anyone who claims to be without sin is simply deceiving himself (**1 John 1:8**). In the striving, the Christian aims at a Christlikeness that remains incomplete. The failure to match the ideal is not a secret; **it is the expected result of still being on the way**.

One Believer to Another: Not Every Struggle Is Hypocrisy

Believers must also be careful about calling other believers hypocrites. Because every true Christian is still being sanctified, the ordinary shortfalls of brothers and sisters are not the same as the deliberate hypocrisy Jesus condemned. Jesus warned, "Judge not, that you be not judged. \ldots Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?" (**Matthew 7:1, 3)**. When one believer quickly labels another a hypocrite for falling short while still confessing and striving, that judgment often ignores the shared struggle. Paul rebuked the Galatians for biting and devouring one another (**Galatians 5:15**) and urged believers to restore those caught in sin with a spirit of gentleness, watching themselves lest they too be tempted (**Galatians 6:1**). **The church is not a place where those still growing are**

rejected as hypocrites; it is the place where believers help one another press on. Calling a fellow believer a hypocrite for the very struggle that marks genuine faith confuses the unfinished work of sanctification with the false performance of those who have no intention of changing.

True Believers or False, the World Will Malign

True believers feel the Holy Spirit's drawing compelling them to change. They focus on Christ, confess their sins, and pursue personal transformation into His likeness. They do not criticize or reject the Bible; they strive to live by its standards. They accept that the church's role is to help them grow in faith, not to reshape biblical teaching around their preferences or the surrounding culture.

False believers, by contrast, often want the church to change. They focus more on culture, customs, and personal comfort than on Christ. Instead of submitting to Scripture and the call to repentance, they pressure the church to accommodate surrounding social norms, traditions, or their own desires. Jesus confronted this same pattern in the Pharisees, who elevated human customs and outward appearances above the weightier matters of the heart (**Matthew 15:1–9; 23:23**). Paul later warned of those who have "the appearance of godliness, but denying its power" (**2 Timothy 3:5**).

In both cases, the world's hatred for Christ and His church seizes on shortcomings—whether the remaining sins and failures of genuine believers or the hypocrisy and worldliness of false ones—to malign and mislabel Christians. It uses these flaws as evidence to discredit Christ and His church, portraying the faith itself as empty, hypocritical, or untrustworthy.

Christ's Example: The Pharisees

Jesus reserved his strongest criticism for people who refused to admit any such gap. The Pharisees cleaned the outside of the cup while the inside remained full of greed and self-indulgence (**Matthew 23:25**). They performed righteousness they did not possess in order to gain status and praise. Their hypocrisy was not the ordinary shortfall of someone still growing; it was the deliberate mask of someone who had no intention of changing. The genuine believer, by contrast, knows the shortfall, confesses it, and keeps striving. **The difference is the heart's direction**.

New Testament Teachings on the Subject

The rest of the New Testament makes the same point. Believers are told not to judge others while ignoring their own faults (**Matthew 7:3–5**). They are called to be doers of the word, not hearers only (**James 1:22**). They are instructed to put off the old self and put on the new (**Ephesians 4:22–24**). These commands are given to people who are still in process, not to people who have already finished. Growth is expected. Paul writes that believers "are being transformed into the

same image from one degree of glory to another" (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). Confessing remaining sin is treated as a sign of honesty, not as proof that the faith is false (1 John 1:9). **In every case, the New Testament assumes that believers will still fall short while they continue to aim higher.**

Church: Equipping Believers

The church's mission is to assist people in this sanctification process. Its purpose is not to reject those who fall short—as they sometimes do—but to love, care for, and help them as the Spirit works. Paul explains that Christ gave leaders to the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (**Ephesians 4:12–13**). The church is where believers stir one another up to love and good works and encourage one another while they wait for Christ's return (**Hebrews 10:24–25**). It is a community that walks alongside people who are still growing, not a place that demands finished perfection before offering welcome or help. **Because this is its mission, struggle, confession, and incomplete progress among its members are not a failure of the church; they show the church doing what it was designed to do—assisting the Spirit's work rather than discarding those who honestly and openly need it.**

Labeling by the World

This ordinary struggle is often misunderstood because the world searches for fault in Christ and those who follow him. Jesus told his disciples, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. … If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (**John 15:18, 20**). John later added, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you" (**1 John 3:13**). The world prefers darkness to light because its own deeds are evil (**John 3:19–20**), so it is always looking for ways to discredit Christianity. It takes the very evidence of genuine striving—the public standard together with remaining failures—and labels the whole thing hypocrisy. In doing so, it ignores the difference between a person who confesses sin and presses on and a person who only performs for appearance. Paul noted that "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (**2 Timothy 3:12**). That opposition includes not only open persecution but also the constant, predictable mislabeling of imperfect yet real discipleship as mere pretense. **The world will always look for fault in Christians and Christianity**; that is simply part of the hostility Scripture teaches us to expect.

Conclustion

True Christians often look inconsistent because sanctification is a lifelong process, not an instant change. The standard they affirm—loving God and neighbor, sexual purity, honesty, humility—is higher than what they currently live. **The gap is real**. What separates this from the hypocrisy Jesus condemned is the heart's direction: the believer sees the shortfall, grieves it, confesses it, and keeps striving by the Spirit's power. The Pharisee hides the shortfall and congratulates himself on the cover-up. So the common charge that "Christians are hypocrites" is often accurate about imperfect performance, yet it misreads the reality when it treats every failure as deliberate acting.

A true believer will only fully live the life he or she professes when glorified at Christ's return. Growth happens now, but it remains incomplete until Christ appears and makes us fully like Him. As John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (**1 John 3:2)**. Paul looks ahead to the day when Christ "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (**Philippians 3:21**) and assures believers that "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 1:6**). ***Until then, the Christian will often be seeking to become what he or she is not yet. That seeking does not disqualify the faith; it is ordinary evidence that the faith is alive.***