

# Clean Water, Red Wine, Broken Bread

A Short Invitation  
to the Christian Faith

Douglas Wilson, *Clean Water, Red Wine, Broken Bread*  
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ISBN: 1-885767-68-4



## Hunger

To the extent we think we have any problems at all, we all like to think of ourselves as poor, misunderstood souls. We *mean* well, and all the trouble we bring to others is the result of mysterious and inscrutable causes. Springsteen had a “wife and kids in Baltimore, Jack,” and so he went out for a ride and he never went back. All this in an attempt to satisfy a hungry heart.

In a real way, we *do* have hungry hearts. But this is because we believe that bread can be made out of sawdust—we think that fidelity can be manufactured out of treachery, and that our self-absorption can, by some strange alchemy, be turned into altruism. We are spiritually hungry, but the reason for this is that we continue to refuse to eat the food God has prepared for us. It is not that a famine has been imposed upon us from the outside, but rather we are hungry because of our distaste for wholesome food.

This booklet is written with the assumption that the reader knows something of the radical nature of the problem with people. He may not know why this is the case, or the extent of the disaster, and he may not believe the situation is any better within the Christian faith, but at least he knows the problem is there. There will consequently be no attempt at flattery.

The Scriptures describe the human race as radically

sinful—or, to use a non-theological term, we are pigs. It might be more rhetorically effective to save this for later, but if the image of God is to be restored in us, we need to face the problem honestly. And if we do, the point must come when we recognize how far we have fallen and how brutish we have become. In desperate circumstances, dishonesty is always deadly. Nothing can be gained by nursing sentimental views of human nature. We have a problem, and anyone who denies the problem cannot have the solution.

But this case can be made effectively enough to make us wonder if the Christian faith can really present any alternative. If men and women are *that* depraved, then it would stand to reason that they would corrupt everything they touch, including every churchy thing they touch. And the data appears to support this—Christian behavior on television certainly does not inspire confidence in the dignity of our species. Instead we find a bizarre stew of head slapping, keeling over, gold furniture, mile-high hair, words of knowledge, sappy songs, biblical ignorance, and all done in the name of Jesus Christ, praise God. If the human race is as bad as it appears to be, how *could* it be possible for the Christian faith to avoid being part of the general bedlam? So this brings us to begin with the problem of the hypocrite.

### **Clearing Away Some Debris**

There is nothing worse than a bad time at church. And from the reports, it appears that many non-Christians have had some really bad experiences with the church. As a result, when these non-believers glance in the direction of Christ, on many occasions the view is obstructed by the “problem of the hypocrite.”

For such non-believers, the problem of hypocrisy in the church appears to be an insurmountable one. Plainly, it seems, hypocrisy reveals Christianity for what it really is—a broad collection of sanctimonious liars tied together in fellowship with a common set of superficial platitudes, which are promptly forgotten when the car door slams shut in the church parking lot.

Here is the problem. We have all seen instances of true hypocrisy. What are we to make of it when pastors run off with other people's wives, when scandal surrounds the handling of finances by various ministries, or even when someone with a "Jesus is Lord" bumpersticker gives another motorist twenty-percent of a wave? All of these people call themselves Christians, and why should any self-respecting non-Christian want to be like them?

The short answer is that he should continue in his desire not to be like them. When we turn to the Bible, we find that hypocrites are treated with an imperfect tenderness.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!  
for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity  
(Matt. 23:27-28).

If we examine this passage (and every other passage on hypocrisy in the Bible), we find that hypocrisy is universally and roundly condemned. In no place does God praise the hypocrite. No where does God encourage the fakes to keep it up through promises of great reward at the day of judgment. When Christ said His followers were the light of the

world, this did not mean that they were to shine the world on.

Bluntly stated, this means that God and the hypocrite are on *opposite sides*. God is opposed to the hypocrite, and the hypocrite is opposed to God. Now what does this mean? What is any non-believer who wields the “problem of hypocrisy” actually doing? He is refusing to serve God, continuing to oppose God, because the hypocrite also is opposing God. He continues to stay away from God because he dislikes how the hypocrites stay away from God. He hates the hypocrite, and so he stands shoulder to shoulder with him. This makes no sense whatever. This is like a citizen of one country refusing to become a citizen of another because it is infested with spies from the first country. Should we really applaud when someone refuses to join the other side because of obnoxious things people on his own side are doing? Using the short form, if there is a hypocrite between an individual and God, then obviously that individual is too far away from God.

The Bible goes on to teach that the hypocrite and the outside objector play off each other. Like two drowning swimmers clutching at each other, they both sink under the judgment of God. In the book of Romans, Paul first addresses, and condemns, the hypocrite.

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:21-23)

He then refers to those outside this arena of hypocrisy, those mocking the name of God because of real hypocrisy. “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” (Rom. 2:24). Obviously, it is a sin to blaspheme the name of God for any reason. But it is understood in Scripture that sinful men will seize upon the excuse of hypocrisy in others in order to continue their own rebellion against God. This blasphemy will be judged right alongside the hypocrisy. If God were to judge our sins alphabetically, then hypocrisy would be judged in between *greed* and *idolatry*.

Hypocrisy does present a problem for the church, but it is the same kind of pastoral problem as those which result from other sins among the members of the church. It is a disciplinary problem and not a problem for Christian apologetics at all.

What must be done with real hypocrites? We must at once limit our answer to real hypocrites who have been exposed in that hypocrisy. The Lord Jesus has given His people no warrant to attempt to peer into the hearts of others. The pretence of being able to do so is itself a species of hypocrisy. So then, what is to be done with someone who has made an open profession of faith in Jesus Christ and has an equally open problem with sin? The biblical answer to this is formal church discipline. Such a person must be put outside of the church where he belongs. And under church discipline, he must be sent out to join his brothers in rebellion—those who refuse to come to Christ because of “all the hypocrites in church.”

This brings us down to the point. The non-believer who is considering the Christian faith must avoid taking his view of it from scoundrels and charlatans. This means two things.



First, he should consider the Christian gospel only when it is presented in a way faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures. And secondly, he should take care to study the question in some depth. The doctrine must be faithful all the way down. Every teaching that contradicts Scripture must be rejected, as well as teaching that merely rests lightly upon the surface of the Scriptures.

### **A Standing Invitation**

The Christian faith proclaims a standing invitation to a grand and glorious banquet. But those who wish to attend this feast must first be washed. This washing is declared by the clean water of baptism. After we are washed, we may sit down at the Lord's Supper, consisting of red wine and broken bread. All these things are explained in the Christian message of salvation, which the bread and the wine in turn declare and embody in another way. These two sacraments are an embodiment of the gospel and provide us with our title—clean water, red wine, and broken bread.

The purpose here is to provide a preliminary explanation of this salvation for thoughtful inquirers. An invitation to this banquet is too gracious to be dismissed out of hand, and it is too profound to accept glibly. The Christian faith is a serious and demanding religion founded on the gladness and delight of God. Given this, it should be obvious that a proper understanding of this faith cannot really be acquired through reading the occasional bumpersticker, billboard, or tract. Because the Christian faith is in fact a *faith*, an all-encompassing worldview, it cannot be reduced to cute little slogans. At the same time, an intelligent initial interest in Christianity does not require graduate level study of all the

doctrines, practices, and history of the Christian faith.

Consequently, it is my hope that this booklet may serve as a *starting* point for those who, for various reasons, have decided to begin taking the invitation to Christian faith seriously. In doing this, I have sought to avoid two common practices: assuming that non-Christians are familiar with Christian jargon and using terms like “born again,” without explaining what that is, and “dumbing down” the faith, emptying it of all specific content. My assumption is that the reader is an intelligent non-believer who wants neither to be patronized nor snowed.

The Lord Jesus told His followers to preach the good news of His kingdom to every creature. This assigned mission is near the center of the Church’s very reason for existence in this world. The message, this good news, is called the gospel, and the purpose of this booklet is to explain that gospel and to invite men to respond to it. So what is this “gospel,” and why is it considered good news?

The condition and situation of readers will of course vary. Some of you readers may not be Christians, but believe you are. Some of you may know you are not Christians, but have no real idea of what you really believe about God. Some may be non-Christians who hold to another set of definite convictions—Islam or Judaism for example. A few may have been transformed by the gospel, but don’t know what has happened to you. Others of you are in the very common situation of having been baptized at some point in their lives, and yet your beliefs are not at all Christian. Your baptism says one thing, but you have come to say another. But in all such cases, the need to grasp the rudiments of the Christian faith remains the same. This means that we should now give ourselves in earnest to the task of understanding.