

THE REAL JESUS

The Man with No Hypocrisy

For anyone who has been a parent, or baby sat kids, or even been around children, you know that you have a constant responsibility to teach children right from wrong. It doesn't come natural to them. It's a constant job, but it isn't always easy because often the kids – especially when they are teenagers – they resist.

When my kids were growing they were not always little angels. One would hit their sister, or one might take what wasn't theirs from another one. And as parents we'd tell the guilty kid that what they did was wrong, and they needed to say they were sorry to their brother or sister who was usually crying. And we'd get a "sorry" with a whole lot of attitude. "Sor-Rey!" It was the right word, but the wrong meaning. They didn't mean one bit of what they said. So, we'd tell them, "You say it again and this time like you mean it!" And hopefully, the second time, we'd hear a sincere apology come out of their mouth.

No one likes someone who says one thing, but doesn't mean what they say. Their words are empty. No one likes politicians who make promises but have no intention of keeping them. Their words are just a show. Not sincere.

This Lent, we're continuing to learn from Jesus, and today we are focusing in on hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is saying or doing one thing but not meaning it. My heart inside doesn't back up what I'm putting out for other people to see.

The idea behind hypocrisy is that there is a *public* me, and that's visible to everybody in my world. Then there is a *private* me, and that may not be visible to the world. In fact, I may not even know the private me because this has to do with my heart, and I might not be paying any attention to my inner life. I might only give my attention to my outer life, the show I put on for others to take in.

Hypocrisy is when the public me and private me do not agree.

The word "hypocrisy" is a negative word for us. It's mostly used in connection with religion. To us hypocrisy mostly describes

people who talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. People who don't live everyday what they say they believe on Sunday.

This was not so in Jesus' time. Greek and Roman religion in Jesus' day had nothing to do with a person's inner character. Religion did not speak about morals or about faith in the heart. The idea of walking the talk was not a concept that was even considered. There were some philosophers, like Socrates, who talked a little about living with high morals. But mostly that was absent.

Religion in ancient times was kind of like a cross between life insurance and a rabbit's foot. The gods back then mostly were violent, vengeful, and sexually immoral. They were worse than people. The idea of religion was to try to appease those gods. Keep them happy. If you did things or gave offerings that kept the gods happy, then they would protect you from disasters today – like life insurance -- and they would give you good luck in the future – like a rabbit's foot.

A lot of people do not know this: our word for *hypocrite*, comes from a Greek word *hupokrites*. It was most commonly associated with the theater. *Hupokrites* were actors on stage. Actors would wear a mask to show which character they were playing. The same actor might play a king in Act 1, and then play a slave in Act 2. So, the word came to refer to people who play a role in public, but privately they are a different person. The word *hupokrites* did not have the sting that it has for us today.



Sepphoris

Here's where it gets interesting. In the first century, a great theater was built in a town called *Sepphoris*. It seated between 3,000 and 4,000 people. It was part of one of the big, big building projects going on in Galilee. Sepphoris was less than an hour's walk away from guess what tiny little town? Nazareth. You could see Sepphoris from Nazareth. There is a very good *probability* that a craftsman from Nazareth by the name of Joseph and his young apprentice Son, Jesus, would have found work helping to construct the great building projects going on in Sepphoris. For sure Jesus as a young boy would be familiar with the stage and the hupokritai, these actors. When Jesus uses this word, it would be a very vivid image for people of His day.

The word *hypocrite* is used 17 times in the New Testament. Every single time it's used, it is used by Jesus. It was Jesus who defined what a hypocrite is, and Jesus' definition of hypocrisy is what people all over the world still use today.

What Jesus thought of hypocrisy is so clear! Matthew, chapter 23, is a stinging rebuke of hypocrisy. We're going to read some of these statements right now. Remember, this isn't written by an enemy of Jesus' church, these are the words of Jesus Himself!

Jesus says, "**Woe to you,**" "Trouble is coming! Judgment is coming!" "**Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!**" Pause here for just a moment. In our day, the word *Pharisee* has a bad name. But in Jesus' day they were the most admired spiritual faith leaders. And Jesus also is addressing teachers of the law...Bible teachers we might say.

In other words, Jesus is talking about a condition that is a hairs' breadth away for anybody who takes faith in God seriously. Jesus knew this condition would infiltrate any movement of faith, including His. Just look at Judas. So when we read these words, we do not pretend **we** are exempt. We do not pretend the Pharisees were the bad guys, and of course we could **never** be like them. We try to read Jesus with repentant and humble spirits.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in peoples' faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites – you blind men!

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tithe of your spices... But you neglect weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

The courage of this Man! Can you imagine the tension? No wonder they killed Him!

Now according to Jesus, hypocrisy is not just the failure to live up to what we aspire to. Of course everybody does that. Instead, what's **at the core of hypocrisy is deception**. "I'm trying to get people to *think* I am someone, who, in fact, I am *not*."



In Jesus' day outside of Jerusalem was a huge cemetery of tombs that were painted white. There are still many there today. When Jesus spoke these words, He was probably standing where

everyone could see this vivid image. Jesus said, the problem is not just that they are tombs full of corpses. They are *whitewashed* tombs. Why would you whitewash a tomb? To make people *think* there's life in it, not death. Can you imagine how cutting these words would be to His listeners?

A dirty cup is a normal thing. So why would anyone clean just the outside? To make people *think* the inside is clean also.



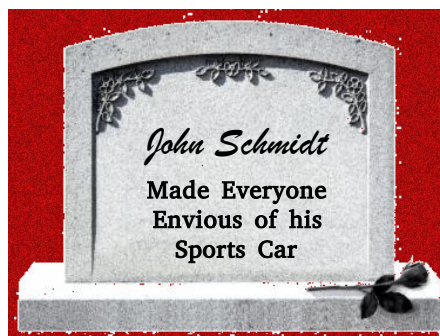
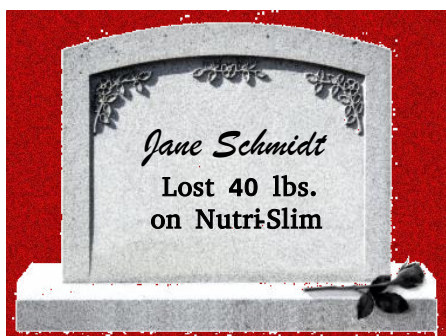
See, in hypocrisy, it's not just that, "I don't live up to the standard." It's that, I deceive you. I hide my secret dislike for you behind a polite smile. I pretend to help you when I'm hoping you fail. I show how loving I am, when inside I'm full of judgment or selfishness. I may even convince myself of the lie.

Hypocrisy is not just reserved for religion. It's a spiritual heart disease that affects all sinful people – and that's *all* of us.

For example, "At a recent annual meeting of the American Heart Association in Atlanta, 300,000 doctors and researchers came together to discuss the importance of low-fat diets in keeping our hearts healthy. But during meal times, they consumed fat-filled fast food, bacon cheeseburgers and chili fries, at the same artery-clogging high rate as people from any other conventions would. One cardiologist was asked, 'Aren't you concerned that your bad eating habits will be a bad example?' He replied, 'Not me. I took my nametag off.'" ~ Stephen Nordbye

Well, if you follow Jesus, you never get to take your nametag off. That's the way it works.

Another example: 85% of medical students think it is improper for *politicians* to accept gifts from lobbyists. But only 46% of medical students think it's improper for *physicians* to accept gifts from drug companies."



We spend our lives pursuing the things that advertisements promise. Privately we go after great looks, great money, great food. But what we *want* written on our tombstone, what we *want* to be remembered for is being a “loving mother” *not* for our looks. People want to be *known* for being a devoted husband and father, and *not* for their cool sportscar, even though we spend our lives pursuing possessions. The public me and the private me do not agree.

This issue of hypocrisy is a really serious problem when it comes to faith in our day. A book called *Unchristian* written a few years ago is based on a research study that shows 85% of unchurched young adults believe Christians to be hypocritical. 85% say, Christians say one thing, do something else. 47% of young adults *inside* the Church say the same thing. This is the main objection non-churched people have to becoming a follower of Jesus.

Now, just because people don't live up to a message does not mean the message itself is wrong.

Dale Bruner has said, (and I love this quote): “**Jesus enemies are not His only problem.**” That’s talking about us. When we, ourselves, do not live up to Jesus’ message, we are hypocrites.

The first king of Israel was a man named Saul. King Saul started out well. It was obvious that he loved and followed God. But he fell away from trusting in God. One day, before a battle, he wanted put on a religious show that would give his army more confidence in battle. He took it on himself to offer sacrifices to God. He was disobeying God by doing this, and His actions were all show. Here’s what God said to King Saul through the Prophet

Samuel: **“What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice....”** 1 Samuel 15:22

Don't those words apply to us – everyday?! To obey God, out of love, from the heart – THIS is what is pleasing to the Lord! He doesn't need or care about any actions or words when your heart isn't sincerely engaged.

The Lord took Saul out of power as king because of his hypocrisy. In today's Old Testament reading, the Prophet Samuel is guided by God to go anoint – or crown – the new King of Israel. God leads Samuel to the town of Bethlehem to Jesse's house. Jesse has his sons paraded before Old Sam, and they sure look like king material! Tall, well-built, big muscles, good looks.

Here's what we read today: **“The LORD said to Samuel, “Don't judge by his appearance or height, The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”** 1 Samuel 16:7 Let me repeat those important words from God: **“...People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”** 1 Samuel 16:7b Does that describe you? So concerned with outward appearance, but your heart at times is so far from God?

Jesus' forgiveness moves Christ-followers to be honest about their sins and need of God's grace.

Bring that sin to God, honestly. Open your heart to Him and ask His forgiveness.

Friends, the gospel...forgiveness by grace...ought to make this the safest and most honest place in the whole world. If there's any place where people ought to be able to come and say, "I'm just going to let the *public* me be the truth about the *private* me," it's here! This is the gathering of people who believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, so we don't have to pretend our sins don't exist, and so we don't put on a public “front” that our sins don't exist. This ought to be the most honest place in the world. Honest about the condition of our hearts – both

before God, and before one another. You sin. I sin. And we *NEED* God's forgiving grace. We need what Jesus has won on the cross and offers freely. He is our only hope!

When you ask for forgiveness, Jesus removes all your sins and guilt *for certain!* He has done all that is needed in His life of sinlessness, and His innocent death where He traded places with you to pay for *YOUR* sins fully. You stand, you live in this grace now!

Jesus hates hypocrisy so much that He even gave His life – both as an *example* of how we should love, and as the *payment* for our sins of hypocrisy.

This means that part of the good news of grace, of the gospel of Jesus, is we do not have to live for the approval of any person. What others think doesn't matter, because I'm already set free and forgiven by God. Jesus died and paid for my wrongs. (Your wrongs) They're gone. So I don't have to pretend like they never were there. And I don't have to try to manage an impression that I'm good, because I'm not forgiven by being good. I'm forgiven by grace, by what Jesus DID for me.

Following Jesus actually means dying to living for approval from others so that we can follow Jesus alone! It's so very freeing that you don't have to live for others' approval. God's approval of you is all that matters, and you've **ALREADY GOT** His approval, because Jesus' dying on the cross for you **WON** God's approval and **GUARANTEES** that you are God's loved son or daughter!

So friends, if you've been holding your heart back from God, if there are areas of your life that are not under God's control, if there are persistent, ongoing patterns of sin in your life, then, take off the mask before God. Get honest before Him. Ask God to take over all your heart, and all your life. No more wearing a mask before God or other people. No more 2 faces.

Then accept His gift of grace that forgives you. And then **LIVE** out His grace. Live to show thanks back to God in everything you do. You'll need help to do this, and the Holy Spirit is just waiting for you to ask. God wants this for you more than you do. He wants the

best for you. He will be there to work in you so you LIVE what you profess to believe.

Now, if you are hearing this and you are not a follower of Jesus because you have seen the hypocrisy of some who claim to be Christ followers, then please just know that this is not what God wants. The real Jesus was a Man of No Hypocrisy. The faults of believers over time are Not a reflection on Jesus. He hates it more than you do.

Friends, it is *SO IMPORTANT* that we genuinely live what we believe. Christ has paid for our hypocrisy, so now let us live in response to His forgiving grace. You see, when your heart and your life are totally in God's control, then it brings honor to the One who loves you, made you, and saved you. It brings peace and great joy to you. And your life becomes a powerful message to people who do not know Jesus yet.

Signs of Sincere Love for Jesus:

No Showy Public Image

HUMILITY

SERVICE

COMPASSION

Unbelieving people these days crave authenticity – finding a group of Christ followers who give their lives over to God and follow in Jesus' way. Your life can draw people to Jesus because your public self and private self agree. Simply yield your life to Jesus to live with His character. Jesus had No Showy Public Image. Live in HUMILITY - not a show of being superior to others. Humility because Jesus lived humbly so He could give His life for you. Live serving other people like Jesus. Live with compassion on all people.

Let's pray now:

Gracious God, thank You that though we all fall short, we're also forgiven freely by Your grace through Jesus Christ.

God, we all struggle with hypocrisy. We all want to present a whitewashed exterior that will win praise and

acclaim. Yet, God, we know how deep inside we all need Your grace. We all need Your healing; we all need Your transformation.

Thank You that You no longer count us as strangers or aliens or outcasts, but through Jesus and through His grace, You welcome us into Your family. You calls us sons and daughters of the living God. God, thank You that You're always at work in us to renew us, transform us, make us new, and to make us more and more into the image of Your Son, Jesus. It's in His name that we pray. Amen.