

WHY I AM A CHRISTIAN - Part eight - Teaching #'s 1237 & 1238

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WHY I LOVE THE LOCAL CHURCH EVEN WHEN PEOPLE SAY IT'S A MAN-MADE INSTITUTION AND IS FULL OF HYPOCRITES

You've all heard it a million times: **"I don't go to church anymore. The church is full of hypocrites!"** If there is one sin people - especially **pagan** people - associate with Christianity, it's hypocrisy. **"Practice what you preach,"** is a slogan that is so familiar, applied to so many different people, we easily lose sight of the fact that by using the word **"preach"** that phrase is forever stamped with a **religious** application.

Just as the problem of **evil and suffering** keeps people from believing in the God of the Scriptures, the accusation that there are **hypocrites in the Church** is the primary means the hard-hearted use to evade the message of the Church and the conviction God means to bring to those who don't believe in Him or call upon the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The charge of hypocrisy is certainly easy to lay these days. These past few decades have been ones of stark disillusionment. News travels so much faster than it used to. We can see the whole world at a glance. Our confidence in public institutions in general has been eroded beyond any hope of repair. Go back to the world of my parents and the general attitude of people to anyone in leadership was **respect**. Today the general attitude toward anyone in leadership is **suspicion**. Even if we don't **know** the leader personally, even if he or she is just a face in the news, if he is a part of the system he's part of the problem. We have come to the place where we **assume** hypocrisy. We **assume** lack of character. We **assume** a large amount of bluff and con in anyone of position.

Even wicked people are sick and tired of hypocrisy and phoniness. In fact, you could easily get the impression that hypocrisy and intolerance are the **only** sins in this world. People almost speak and write as though as long as you are **open** and **unhypocritical about committing sin, you are righteous**: "Sure I drink too much, but at least I'm honest about it!" Or, "Certainly my wife and I fool around sexually. We've talked about it openly and come to a mutual agreement. We're very honest in our sexuality." Or, "Pastor Don, I don't even bother **going** to church anymore. I know I'm not living for the Lord and, after all, I don't want to be a hypocrite about it."

What never seems to dawn on these people is hypocrisy is not the **only** sin God hates. He will judge sexual immorality whether people are honest and open about it or not. A thief is still a thief, even if he's an honest thief. There are a host of other sins God condemns. Just because you aren't a hypocrite doesn't make you righteous. Honesty doesn't **cleanse** you from these other sins. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that.

But this world does have its antenna up to detect phoniness and the church hasn't escaped this suspicion. Nor has it earned an exemption. We've all seen the scandals on TV. We all know how many Christians play the game. We know the duplicity. We can usually see it in everyone but ourselves (remember Jesus' words about the speck in our brother's eye and the log in our own?).

Is the church full of hypocrites? If she isn't, why do so many people accuse her of being so? I can think of several reasons this accusation springs so quickly from the lips of critics:

1) MANY PEOPLE ACCUSE THE CHURCH OF HYPOCRISY BECAUSE THEY CONFUSE THE TERMS HYPOCRISY AND SIN

Likewise, the terms **"hypocrite"** and **"sinner"** are confused. So people rather carelessly put it all together in their minds something like this:

- a) The church is full of **sinners**
- b) **Hypocrites** are sinners
- c) The church is full of **hypocrites**

But this doesn't follow at all. Let me give you another example just to illustrate what I mean:

- a) The church is full of **sinners**
- b) **Rapists** are sinners
- c) The church is full of **rapists**

I think you can start to see what I mean. One term (**sinner**) is more general and inclusive, while the other (**hypocrite** or **rapist**) is more exclusive and specific. All hypocrites are sinners, for sure. But not all sinners are hypocrites.

2) **SOMETIMES PEOPLE SAY THE CHURCH IS FULL OF HYPOCRITES BECAUSE THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE AND PROFESSION**

I think we need to be patient and exercise understanding toward those who are outside the saving grace of Jesus Christ. There is a lot of confusion out there. Many times outsiders simply **observe** Christians sinning. They see things in our lives that don't add up.

Remember they know very little about the Christian life. All they know **for sure** is Christians are **not supposed** to sin. They know that at least **we Christians** believe sin is a bad thing. Then they **see** us commit some sin. And they know we aren't **supposed** to sin. Therefore, we're hypocrites in their eyes.

Do you see what has happened? In their ignorance about Christianity they have mixed something **true** - Christians **shouldn't sin** - and something **untrue** - when Christians, who **know** they shouldn't sin **do** sin, they must be **hypocrites**. The unspoken (and false) assumption they have made is that **the Christian is one who claims he doesn't sin**. So when he **does** sin, he's a hypocrite.

But no Christian worth his salt would **claim** he never sins. We **strive** not to sin. We **strive** for perfection in holiness. We **strive** not only to be **"in Christ Jesus,"** but, as the Apostle Paul says in **Galatians 4:19**, we strive to have **"...Christ formed in us."** We are **"in Christ"** when we are saved. The process of **"Christ being formed in us"** is progressive and gradual. It takes years.

But no Christian I know **claims** to be totally without sin. In fact, just the opposite is true. The Christian life can't even be entered into until I admit that I **am** a sinner. That's how the whole walk with Jesus starts. The Church (and here I mean the Body of Christ) is the only body on earth you absolutely **cannot** join until you admit you're a sinner.

You can join the Library, the Country Club, Club Link, any Health Club of your choice, you can apply for any Gold Card or group membership you want. As far as I know, none of them requires you to admit you are a sinner. But not so the Church. You simply **can't** become a part of the Body of Christ until you admit you **are** a sinner. In that one sense at least, the Church is the **least** hypocritical body in the whole world.

3) **SOMETIMES PEOPLE SAY THE CHURCH IS FULL OF HYPOCRITES BECAUSE THERE ARE HYPOCRITES IN THE CHURCH**

Unfortunately, Christians **are** guilty of all sorts of sins. And the sin of hypocrisy is one of the sins they commit. We all find the lure of pretending to be more spiritual than we are very enticing. It gives us the **image** of Godliness without the **cost** of Godliness. That's because hypocrisy feeds our fallen **pride** with applause for **pretended** spirituality, whereas true Godliness can only be developed with the **crucifixion of self**.

So, to be painfully honest, there **are** hypocrites in the institutional church. In fact, people detect hypocrisy in the institutional church for at least three common reasons:

- a) **Sometimes there are people in the church who profess faith but are not born again.** This is getting increasingly common. In this age where people are taught to assert their own rights and their own will, there is a growing number of church goers who try to **claim salvation on their own terms**.

I had a person in this church tell me recently, **"I do love Jesus, but nobody is going to tell me how to**

live. "Now that person is just proving he has no understanding at all about the Lordship of Jesus. He thinks he can profess Christ and order his own life exactly as he wants. And he expects the church to accept his approach to Christianity.

Many people are tied into a church *socially* because many of their friends are there. They've been *raised* in the church and feel at home there. Many people keep coming to church because they can see the moral chaos and corruption all around them and they feel the church can instill some good moral values in their children.

Of course, none of those things is the same as *conversion*. These people aren't committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and sooner or later that is going to be reflected in their actions and priorities.

But the people who *see* these churchgoers only see the surface of their lives. They don't know these people aren't a valid measuring stick of Christianity. They don't know they don't have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. So they *assume* these churchgoers are Christians. And when they see their actions outside the church, they *assume* they are hypocrites.

Jesus Himself predicted that the visible church would always be a mixture of *wheat* and *weeds*: **Matthew 13:24-30** - "He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, [25] but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. [26] So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. [27] And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' [28] He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' [29] But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

- b) ***Sometimes churches are the source of the problem of hypocrisy.*** There are communities of faith where people don't *live* like Christians because the church doesn't *teach* and *insist* that they live like Christians.

There are many churches that never call for a clear confession of biblical faith. Nor do they call people to live lives distinctly separated from the ways of the world around them. Many churches are nothing more than a pathetic reflection of the culture around them. They are no longer salt and light.

- c) ***Sometimes genuine Christians are careless about keeping their vows of dedication to the Lord.*** People on the outside, especially those *looking* for an excuse to reject Christ, notice these inconsistencies.

Perhaps this is where hypocrisy is at its ugliest and most damaging to the cause of Christ. Christians make promises to the Lord. Every truly converted person promises to ***crucify the life of self-gratification and dedicate himself or herself to the pleasure and glory of God.*** Unfortunately, this world *pulls Christians away* from that foundational, saving commitment.

Christians commit to ***faithfulness to the local church.*** But here again, this world gets very busy. Christians can easily bump commitment to the Body of Christ down the list as spendable time begins to shrink.

In all these areas - the ***dedication of children*** - the ***sacrificial investment of finances in the extension of Christ's kingdom*** - and a host of other promises that accompany salvation - it is easy to *forget*, or at least *neglect* vows of faithfulness that accompany saving grace. That's why the Scriptures give warnings ***not*** to forget our primary commitments of service to the Lord:

Psalm 64:10-65:2 - "Let the righteous one rejoice in the Lord and take refuge in him! Let all the

upright in heart exult![65:1] To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. A Song. Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed. [2] O you who hears prayer, to you shall all flesh come."

So our religion can't be all *talk*. We are to be *mindful* of the promises we make to the Lord. They don't lose their weight before God just because some of them were made long ago. They aren't annulled just because our *feelings* change over the years. God *hears* our vows. God *remembers* our vows, even when we forget them.

4) **HYPOCRISY IS SUCH A DAMAGING SIN BECAUSE IT EFFECTS BOTH THE SINNER AND THOSE WATCHING THE SINNER**

Remember, hypocrisy is always an *intentional* sin. This is what makes *hypocrisy* different from *failure*. Hypocrisy is *pretending* a righteousness on the *outside* that we don't genuinely possess on the *inside*. The hypocrite is usually one person in *public* (or in Christian company) and another person in *private* (or with a different set of friends). And the hypocrite expends vast energy *maintaining* this deception. Jesus sliced right to the core of the ugliness and phoniness of the sin of hypocrisy:

Matthew 23:13-14, 25-28 - "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. [14].... 23:25-28...."Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. [27] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. [28] So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

For Christians who have taken the time and effort to familiarize themselves with the teaching of Jesus Christ in the gospels we see an *anger* in His words just read that we don't often see. Obviously this sin *bothered* Jesus deeply. Why did He sound so alarmingly harsh and sharp in these denunciations of hypocrisy?

I think there are probably *two reasons*:

- a) ***First, probably no sin is more numbing to the true heart for God than hypocrisy.*** Hypocrisy is *not* the only sin. Christians commit many others. But, unlike other sins, hypocrisy not only brings *guilt* to the soul, it *blinds and hardens* the soul to *repent* of its sin.

That's because to be a successful hypocrite one must, at least much of the time, *pretend* the inward sin doesn't exist. It's this stubborn outward pretending of righteousness that *makes* the sin of hypocrisy so tempting and effective. But if the sin is *enticing* it's also *highly infectious*. The longer the hypocrite is successful in his deception, the less likely he is to ever *repent* of the sins he is committing: **1 Timothy 4:1-2** - "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, [2] through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...."

Have you ever *seared* a piece of meat on a grill. The outside gets all crusted and hard. Paul tells Timothy that, especially in the last days, people will *"depart from the faith."* He says they will become victims of *"deceitful spirits."* It all sounds so serious and extreme.

How will this happen? How *can* this happen to Christian people? Paul says this *departing from the faith* (which seems to indicate they *had* faith to depart *from*) will have its roots in the lying sin of *insincerity* (or *hypocrisy*). People will shut the truth out of their own hearts by listening to and practicing lies and deceit. They'll come to the place where they can't tell genuine righteousness anymore.

That's what happens when you play around with the truth you have received. You can turn the volume down on your own inward witness to truth. You can shut your own conscience off. You can silence the

Holy Spirit until you not only deceive **others** with your lifestyle, you deceive **yourself**.

Fundamentally, hypocrisy robs the inner life of **honesty**. It turns off the inner security screening for all the other sins that seek to enter our hearts. Hypocrisy paves the way for every other sin: **Luke 12:1** - "**In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."**

Hypocrisy is called the **leaven** of the Pharisees. They did **many** wicked things. But hypocrisy, quite literally, was the **leaven** that **gave rise** to them all.

- b) **Second, hypocrisy not only destroys the life of the hypocrite, it destroys the life of those who observe the hypocrite.**

This is why Paul says evil spirits have a keen interest in the successful masquerade of the hypocrite. The hypocrite's fall not only destroys his **own** credibility, it destroys the credibility of thousands of other faithful Christians. One hypocrite can undo the good influence of a thousand faithful witnesses.

There are multitudes of observers in this world who want nothing do with Christ or His church because they have been **spiritually violated** by hypocritical professors of Christ. Jesus said there would be, quite literally, **hell** to pay for those who used His Name to lead others astray spiritually:

Luke 16:26-17:2 - "**And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.** [27] **And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— [28] for I have five brothers —so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.'** [29] **But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'** [30] **And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'** [31] **He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'** "[17:1] **And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! [2] It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin."**

I'm personally convinced that these verses **should** be read together, just as we read them. They answer a troubling question. ***Why would these unbelieving people be unconvinced of the danger facing them even if someone came back from the dead to tell them about the coming judgment?***

I think Jesus' words **following** this account help with the answer. It's very difficult to turn people back to the truth **after** they've been burned by a bad experience with a professing follower of God. That's why Jesus immediately warns his disciples of the horrible **consequences** of causing anyone to stumble in this way.

If I am a professing Christian, Jesus says people have the right to **assume** that I am careful and serious enough in my Christian walk that they can trust that, while I might not be perfect, I'm inwardly **striving** for perfection. I'm the real deal. That's what Jesus meant when he talked about not just cleaning up the **outside** of the dish and leaving the **inside** filthy. People have the right to **assume** I am absolutely thorough in my relationship with Jesus Christ - that His Lordship is **total** and **unquestioned**.

In other words, the people who see me and know me have the right to assume I'm what they should look like if **they** give their hearts to Jesus Christ. And they should have the right to **assume** that my faith is the **real deal**.

5) **THE ONLY WAY TO BE HOLY, SAFE AND FRUITFUL**

Jesus wants to make your life and mine **genuinely** His. If you want to make your assessment of Christianity this morning, then remember this: **Jesus was not a hypocrite**. He proved His love was more than words by dying on

the cross for your sin. He proved He was the Son of God by rising from the dead on Easter morning. There was not a phony bone in His body.

And He can make you a genuine disciple of His today. You see, the church doesn't exist to bring any praise or glory to any of its members. None of us is worthy of that. The church exists to bring praise and glory to Jesus Christ. And He will prove His authenticity to any who will forsake their sin, and call on Him with a sincere and humble heart.