

## Hypocrisy

By: Lincoln Forlong

### What exactly is hypocrisy?

Oh how quickly many point the finger accusingly with a lofty stare and declare, "You hypocrite!". When we take a stand and say, "Hey, that's not right. You are doing the wrong thing." Is this really hypocritical? What was Jesus' intentions when he referred to hypocrites in the Bible? Well I believe this is a topic that has been seriously misconstrued and abused over the years, so I want to look at the definition of a hypocrite through the discerning gaze of the Word of God.

#### Literal meaning of 'hypocrite' in the Greek:

According to **The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, 'Hupokrisis' primarily denotes a reply, an answer. It came to mean the acting of a stage-player, because such answered one another in dialogue; hence the meaning 'dissembling' or 'pretence'. It is translated 'dissimulation' or 'hypocrisy'.

Dictionary meaning of 'Dissemble': 'To conceal facts, intentions, or feelings under some pretence.'

**The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia** of the Bible explains it this way:

'The word in the New Testament applied to human conduct that was externally religious but insincerely motivated, the simulation of goodness.'

**Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary** defines it this way:

'Pretending to be what one is not. The New Testament meaning of hypocrisy and hypocrite reflects its use in Greek drama. In the Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask and played a part on the stage, imitating the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character portrayed.'

#### **Examples of hypocrisy in the Bible:**

##### Hypocritical Group 1: The Pharisees

In **Matthew 23** Jesus says, regarding the Pharisees "...you hypocrites!" in verses 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, and in numerous other verses throughout all the gospels. Because of this I think we can safely assume that Jesus regarded the Pharisees as hypocrites.

#### Definition of a Pharisee:

Pharisee: A member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic law (the teachings of Moses) in both its oral and written form as well as teaching strict observance of Jewish tradition as interpreted rabbinically.

"You snakes! You brood of vipers!..." Jesus declared to the Pharisees in **Matthew 23:33**

#### Definition of a Viper:

noun

1. any of a widespread family (Viperidae) of venomous snakes, including the pit vipers, the European adder, and the African puff adder

2. any of various other poisonous or supposedly poisonous snakes
3. a malicious or spiteful person; a treacherous person

The vipers represent the pinnacle of venomous snake existence. The efficiency of their design is admirable. They boast a long pair of hinged fangs which lay flat against the roof of the mouth when not needed, but can flip forward and lock into place real fast when the jaws swing open. Many vipers have skin colouring that provides a kind of camouflage so they blend into their surroundings. They look harmless enough, until they strike!

What exactly made the Pharisees hypocrites? They professed to be wise and spiritual. They thought of themselves as good in the eyes of God, yet inside they were full of hypocrisy and sin. They claimed to know God and sought to lead others to Him, but in so doing they were in actual fact leading others AWAY from God and into the pits of hell:

**Matthew 23:15** “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 are’. (Yikes!)

In Matthew 5, from verses 21 to 47, Jesus repeatedly uses the phrase **“You have heard that it was said...”** In verses 21, 27, 33, 38 and 43 Jesus is *not* referring to the Old Testament, but to Rabbinical traditions that in actual fact contradicted and invalidated the Old Testament. The Rabbis had misconstrued and externalized the commandments of God. So Jesus makes it clear that the more important issue is the state of the heart. Unrighteous anger is equal to murder. Lust is equal to adultery, and so on.

**Luke 18:9-14** ‘ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like all other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” The Pharisees were darkened in their hearts and ignorant, proud and covetous. **Matthew 23.**

**Matthew 23:25-28** ‘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. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will also be clean.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

There are those who look all spiritual on the outside. They dress nicely, speak ‘spiritually’, go to Church regularly and by all appearances seem godly. Unfortunately, they see themselves as superior to others but on the inside they are full of lust, covetousness, hatred, and jealousy. They harbour nothing but false motives.

The Pharisees took great pride in wearing their phylacteries (boxes containing Scripture verses, which were worn on the forehead and arms), and prayer shawls for all to see (**Mat. 23:5-7**). They stood on street corners to pray, so everyone could see them (**Mat. 6:5-7**). They were completely self-deceived.

Therefore hypocrisy is where your actions attempt to cover up the true state of your heart. A heart which is full of sin, yet refuses to acknowledge it. A hypocrite typically goes to extraordinary lengths to appear faultless. They flatter themselves with many words and go about looking as spiritual and religious as possible. They are a living, breathing walking paradox.

### *Hypocritical Group 2: The Unbelieving Gentiles*

**Luke 3:7-8 'John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.'**

Crowds of people came out to be baptized by John. Did he receive them with open arms and warm fuzzy expressions of acceptance? Nope. He hit them first with an eye-opening hard hitting statement designed to show them the state of their unregenerate hearts. **"You brood of vipers!"** (NOT feeling the love!) **"...Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."** Not quite the message we get from many evangelists today! He then proceeded to explain what he meant:

**v11 "...The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one with food should do the same."**

**v13 (to the Tax Collectors) " Don't collect anymore than you are required to,"...**

**v14 (to the Soldiers) "...Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely- be content with your pay."**

In other words, a changed heart reflects that transformation in its actions. Conversely, evil deeds reflect an evil heart. Someone who has repented of their sin and made Jesus their Lord will express that turn around through imitation of Christ's righteousness.

John even rebuked Herod because he had his brother's wife and did many other evil things. Herod promptly threw John in jail. In today's society, why are WE therefore, so afraid to exhort someone who needs it? Are we afraid of their reaction? Harsh words? Are we afraid we'll be disliked and rejected? Isn't that the suffering that Jesus endured? Yet we're hardly going to be arrested or crucified for it in this culture.

In regards to the nature of many non-Christians: Generally they consider themselves to be good people. They haven't murdered anyone. They don't rob banks. They don't rape women. They live fairly law-abiding lives. Surely then, if there is a God, He'll welcome them into heaven when they die, being the loving God that He is! Unfortunately, this is just another prime example of hypocrisy in action. Thinking you are good enough, that you're not a bad person, is self-deceiving and erroneous to the highest degree. Such persons refuse to acknowledge the true state of their heart.

How many people do we know who profess to be Christians but their attitude and behaviour is consistently the very antithesis of everything they supposedly believe? They show a complete lack of interest in the Scriptures and in God Himself. Those who profess to be Believers but exhibit these kinds of characteristics, are the very kind of people that the Bible says we are to judge. It is not our place to judge *non-Christians* who willingly admit they are unbelievers, but we ARE to judge those who claim to be Christians and yet show no regard for God or His Word. Why? Because they are exhibiting a kind of hypocrisy that is damaging to the

testimony of God and His Son. Furthermore, they could be self-deceived and on their way to Hell, when all the while they think they're on their way to Heaven! They must be exhorted to examine themselves.

**1 Corinthians 11:31 'But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.'**

**1 Corinthians 13:5 'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?'**

### *Hypocritical Group 3: Disobedient Christians*

So where do we fit in? We're not Pharisees and we're not unbelieving Gentiles. We're Christians. And what is it that makes us a Christian? We acknowledge our sinfulness (and utter depravity) before a holy God and we choose to submit to His Lordship. Submitting to Him entails putting our faith in Him, realizing there is NOTHING we can do to earn His favour. We acknowledge that He has already done it all for us. The evidence of true faith is following the Scriptures as best we can, even while in these fleshly bodies. Jesus becomes the replacement of all other religions, ideas and opinions. When we fall, we feel bad about it, confess it, turn from it and move on. This is the continuing pattern of a true believer.

**HOWEVER**, we can certainly exhibit areas of hypocrisy in our lives when we fail to do what we know we should do, or worse, pretend we are doing it when we are really not! Peter was guilty of a similar hypocrisy when he became more afraid of other people's opinions than sticking to his God-given convictions to minister to the Gentiles. When the Jews arrived, he withdrew from the Gentiles, even though he previously ate with them on a regular basis. Unfortunately, his act of withdrawal led others into the same hypocrisy, and, in the end, Paul publicly rebuked him (**Gal 2:11, 14**).

**Galatians 2:13 'The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.'**

Paul showed Peter his sin. He exposed the error of his ways. He did this because he loved Peter and he loved his Lord. Peter's hypocrisy was hurting his testimony and influencing others behaviour. Paul pointed this out. Can we accuse Paul of being a hypocrite? Can we accuse him of being unloving and harsh? I think not.

Paul warns us to stay away from Christians who are *unrepentant* in their sin and show no interest in submitting to the Scriptures. Such behaviour is the kind of hypocrisy that is reflective of the Pharisees and association with such people is not only a bad influence on others, but also a bad testimony for the church:

**2 Thessalonians 3:6 'In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.'**

What about those who say "*I won't go to church anymore because the church is full of hypocrites.*" To make such a statement is basically saying you think you're better than those people, you're above them and you are unwilling to forgive them (**Phil 2:3-4**). To ignore the explicit command of Scripture to not give up meeting together because you can't love the Brethren is beyond hypocritical. (**Heb 10:25**)

What about the people who cry "*You judgmental critical person!*" when you expose the sin of others or the error of other religions or churches?

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous verses in the Scriptures that COMMAND us to correct and rebuke each other, under the authority of God's Word (**2 Tim 3:16; 4:2-3.**)

**Ephesians 5:11-14 'Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible.'**

We are not hypocrites if we are *ashamed* of our sin and we acknowledge our sinfulness to a holy God with a continuous desire to be like Him. Henceforth, it's with this attitude, with a spirit of humility and empathy we should approach a brother caught in sin. A true hypocrite is one who refuses to acknowledge their own wrongdoing and instead turns on you with a barrage of attacks. They see themselves as good and righteous.

**Matthew 7:1-6 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**

**"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

**Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then tear you to pieces.'**

Verses 1 and 2 is referring to human judgment. It's judging a brother from our own perspective, and seeing their sin as a personal affront against us rather than an affront against God Himself. Our human judgments are usually petty judgments that have no standing in the Word of God. In verse 3, the speck of sawdust referred to is more like a twig according to the Greek text. And the plank is more accurately a beam.

Many people today quote the first part of this passage, but conveniently neglect to recite the second part. v5 **'You hypocrite, FIRST take the plank out of your own eye, and THEN you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.'** (Emphasis added.) It is clearly imperative therefore, that when it comes time to rebuke or exhort a brother caught in a particular sin, we must first examine ourselves and remove any hint or tendency towards that same sin. THEN, and only then, may we proceed with our efforts to rescue a brother trapped in an ungodly vice. Please note also, it says here '*brother*'. We are to tenderly expose sin in our brothers and sisters in Christ, not those outside the church.

In verse 6 Jesus continues to give us some wise advice. There are those who consistently reject the truth of Scripture, especially as you try to lovingly correct them. The more you try to feed it to them, the more they will turn on you and rip you to shreds. It soon becomes obvious that it is of no benefit at all to go to the trouble and effort to share the Word with such a person. They are very likely unsaved and not seeking to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. Consider **Titus 3:10-11**

**'Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.'**

A godly person is convicted by the Words of God. A godly person would acknowledge their short-falls and admit they need to change in certain areas. Just look at the beatitudes in **Matthew 5:2-10**: Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful,

who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers and who are persecuted! They feel awful about their sin and yearn for the truth! Consider the response by the Corinthians to Paul's strongly worded letter to them:

**2 Corinthians 7:8-13** 'Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it –I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while –yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.'

#### Worldly Sorrow:

- "Oh no, I've been caught!"
- More upset about the consequences of one's sin than the sin itself and its abhorrence by God.

#### Godly Sorrow:

- Leads to repentance/A complete turnabout and change in behaviour
- Brings humility and a contrite heart before God
- Allows the Scripture to do its work and convict

As Christians we are indeed to judge each other in the Lord:

**1 Cor. 5:11** 'But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.'

**1 Cor. 5:12-13** 'What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

Along the same lines, we are to correct and rebuke each other if necessary. So many Christians these days are afraid to stand up for the Word of God and implement its mandates. But there are many verses in the Scriptures that command and implore us to do this very thing. As Christians we are to be growing and becoming more like Christ. We are to be a living testimony to His existence and salvation. What happens if a Christian falls? What happens if a Christian is led astray or becomes trapped in a sin or becomes misled by heretical teaching? Without accountability and brothers and sisters in Christ to lovingly pull him up and set him straight, he will flounder. He will cause an immense amount of damage to himself, to others around him and, most of all, he will dishonour his Lord. It is absolutely imperative that we hold each other accountable and confront each other lovingly whenever the need arises:

**2 Timothy 3:16** 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

**4:2** 'Preach the Word: be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth, and turn aside to myths.'

**Titus 1:9 'He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.'**

**v13 'Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith ...'**

**v16 'They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.'**

**2:15 'These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority.'**

If we succeed in bringing a sinning brother or sister to repentance then that is indeed a glorious thing! Not only have we saved them from perhaps spiraling into the depths of more sin, but we have also prevented the name of Christ becoming further sullied. We must be willing to receive such Christians back with open arms (as in The Prodigal Son – **Luke 15:11-32**) and put into practice the act of forgiveness, even if their sin was a direct affront against us. This is the supreme demonstration of the very same love and forgiveness that Christ showed to us, even though we didn't deserve it. How could a Christian caught in sin ever hope to be restored, if his own family in Christ would not lovingly receive him back? What an awful travesty that would be!

We ALL have the potential to fall into terrible sin. We need to recognize this in ourselves and be willing to extend the same hand of forgiveness to others, as we would hope to receive if we found ourselves in a similar situation. The Body of Christ cannot function effectively without loving accountability, exhortation, confrontation and forgiveness of sin.