



Hypocrites

"Boy, those Christians are such hypocrites!" This is what we hear from those outside the church and sometimes, sadly, even from other Christians. I've even heard Christians say, "All Christians are hypocrites!"

If all Christians are hypocrites, and all unbelievers are hypocrites too, then everyone must be a hypocrite! The word has then lost its meaning because it no longer describes any particular distinction. It erases the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate. All Christians are made out to be phony and insincere, too.

There seems to be a real misunderstanding of what a hypocrite is. This needs clarification. All men are sinners, but not all are hypocrites.

To some, being a hypocrite means that you don't live up to or practice what you believe. Every time a believer sins, he is labeled by some as a hypocrite. Actually, the meaning of this word in the Bible is quite different. A real hypocrite is someone who acts outwardly religious, but is inwardly profane. What does the Bible say?

In the Old Testament we have the word "*hanep*" which means polluted, wicked, or ungodly (cf. Job 8:13; 13:16; 20:5; 27:8). It is translated "hypocrite."

Our English word comes from the Greek used in the New Testament. "*Hypo*" means under, below, or beneath. The other half of the word hypocrisy comes from the Greek word "*krino*" which means to separate, to select, or to judge. In other words you are beneath or less than what you are judged to be. This word was commonly used to describe a Greek play-actor. Before the days of Hollywood makeup, actors wore large masks to play their characters.

This word was then used by Jesus to describe and condemn those, like the Pharisees, who gave an outward appearance of godliness, but in their hearts they were ungodly and unregenerate. Jesus used this designation first in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5, etc.) to show that the Pharisees would put on a good show before men to be seen of and be glorified by men. Later, throughout Matthew 23, Jesus uses this word again to show how deceptive and empty a hypocrite is. They tried to show faithfulness with a faithless heart. Jesus condemns them when he says,

"Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

(Matthew 15:7-9)

Nowhere in the Bible are true believers ever called hypocrites. They are warned against it, and instructed to expose it. A Christian is not hypocrite because of the grace of God. Those who act like they are Christians and are not — these are hypocrites.

The heart of a Christian has been regenerated — made alive and new. The old nature of man still clings to the Christian, and because of that, Christians sin. But that is not hypocrisy. Hypocrites have an unbelieving heart and try to make people believe that they are right with God because they wear the mask of good works. The Christian experience is different. When Christians sin, they are not wearing the mask of an actor — pretending to be something they are not. Their heart is right and their life is wrong. That is not phony. That is real.

Why bother with this? Because we need to disarm the unbeliever who gleefully lumps the sinning Christian into the same lump he comes from. To unbelieving critics of Christianity, the grace of God in the heart of the Christian has made no difference. He sins just like the unbeliever.

It is true that the believer sins. But, there is hope for the Christian. He repents and God forgives. The hypocrite has an unrepentant heart, and is not forgiven. He has no hope of deceiving God with a pretentious mask.

The Bible uses another word — *"anupokritos"*

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy"

(James 3:17)

Christians are inconsistent with their new nature. They still sin. They still battle the old nature which clings to them (Romans 7:15-25). Don't let the fact that Christians are not hypocrites reduce the seriousness of sin. On the contrary, sin will grieve the Christian more, because he is not living the life consistent with the new heart God has given him. The good news is that Jesus Christ has paid for our sins and purchased for us a new heart that truly believes and seeks to serve the God who has loved us (Romans 7:24-25).

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