

## Sins of the Spirit #7: Hypocrisy, part 2 Matthew 23:1-31

I heard recently about a SC congress woman (Nancy Mace) who spoke at a prayer breakfast. In her remarks, she let slip that she was living in sin with her fiancé. She said that she had gotten out of bed with a man who was not her husband to attend this prayer breakfast. This woman has been divorced twice and is currently living in sin, but it was important for her to speak at this prayer breakfast. Seems just a little hypocritical. But that seems to be very common these days. Religion for many is merely a mask, a costume that people put on and take off. They live in blatant disregard to Christianity and they put on a religious exterior whenever it suits them, whenever it serves their purposes. They talk but they do not walk. That's textbook hypocrisy. And it's true of many people, not only politicians. It may be true of some of us in this room right now.

In Matthew 23, Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Remember that a hypocrite is a play actor. He puts on religion like a mask or a costume. He appears to be religious for his own selfish purposes.

Mt 23:3 ... *they say, and do not.*

Mt 23:28 *Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the characteristics of hypocrites. We found that hypocrites focus on externals instead of on the inner man. They major on minor rules and regulations instead of on fundamental moral principles. They are proud and corrupt rather than humble and compassionate. They don't really care about the law, salvation, the needy, prayer, the temple, the truth, tithing, or weighty spiritual matters. They look good externally, but within, they are full of dead men's bones, uncleanness, extortion, and excess. They are serpents and vipers even though they appear to be righteous. Ultimately, their religion is a fraud, a pretense, and they are in danger of the damnation of hell.

Sadly, some Christians are guilty of hypocrisy. They are not in danger of spending eternity in hell, but they are like the scribes and Pharisees in some ways. If we claim to be followers of Jesus, we must avoid the sin of hypocrisy. We must examine our own lives and purge them from any hint of hypocrisy.

Now that we've considered the characteristics of hypocrisy, let's see what Jesus said about...

I. the solution to hypocrisy

A. Don't be a hypocrite

.3b “do not ye after their works.” Avoid the attitudes and behaviors typical of hypocrites. Don't do all the things that Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of; avoid these characteristics and behaviors.

B. Be humble.

1. .8, 10 Don't be concerned about honorary titles, public recognition or approval.

The point here is not so much that all such titles are invalid or sinful, but that we should not seek such titles or insist that people use honorary titles for us.

- a) .8 We should not call ourselves Rabbi—“great one.”

Most of us would be rather annoyed if someone demanded we recognize his/her greatness. We don't insist that others recognize our accomplishments or credentials.

- b) .9 We should not call ourselves “father” in the religious sense.

If we lead someone to Christ, we may be a “spiritual” father in some sense (1 Cor 4:15), yet that should not be a title that religious leaders/teachers take for themselves. “Father” is not an appropriate title for a religious leader. The proper title for fellow Christians is “brother.”

I wonder what the RCs say about this verse?

- c) .10 We should not call ourselves “master” (καθηγητής), i.e., guide, instructor, leader. Implicit in that title would be the authority to command and control others. I.e., don't push your authority.

Some people enjoy that authority to tell others what to do. The scribes and Pharisees liked to force their traditions on everyone.

In Christianity, the final authority is God, not some leader or teacher, and not some unbiblical man-made tradition.

**App:** The point here is that we should not insist that others treat us honorably. Don't concern yourself with titles of distinction or places of honor. Don't use religious position or title as a way of gaining acceptance, recognition, or approval. That's what the scribes and Pharisees did, and it was hypocritical.

**Illus.:** In our setting today, some religious leaders enjoy the title "doctor." The leaders of the church and Christian institutions are usually doctors, meaning that they have academic credentials that they have earned. E.g., PhD, DD, DTh, DMin.

One thing that I noticed in the academic world of college and seminary is that people with earned credentials often don't insist that people use their titles, while those with unearned, honorary doctorates often insist that others call them "doctor." Those who have earned the credential don't flaunt it, while those who have not earned it insist that others use it.

**Quote:** [The use of honorific titles] tends to engender pride, and a sense of superiority in those who obtain it, and envy and a sense of inferiority in those who do not; and the whole spirit and tendency of it is contrary to the "simplicity that is in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Even if we have earned titles, credentials, or places of authority, we should not use those to promote ourselves or demean others.

2. .8end Consider yourself to be "brethren" with all the others. Christians are all equal in their position before God.

You may recall that the disciples James and John tried to secure elevated positions for themselves at Jesus' right hand in his kingdom (Mt 20:21).

Jesus tells his disciples that they are all on the same level and they are all under the authority of their true master, Jesus. Jesus is the only head of the church. All believers have equal rights and privileges. We should all think of ourselves as servants—we serve God by serving one another.

Matthew 20:26–28 ... *whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes' Notes

3. .11 Even if you have a high position of authority, you are still a servant. Even those in positions of authority should exercise servant leadership, like Jesus did (John 13).
4. .12 Humble yourself, don't exalt yourself. Let the Lord put you in a place of authority. If others think of you in honorable terms, that's fine. But we should not vigorously promote ourselves, seek positions of honor, or demand honorable titles. We should not be using religion to gain places of honor for ourselves.

*Jer 45:5 And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not...*

Humility is an effective remedy for hypocrisy. Humble people are not typically hypocritical because they are not seeking recognition or approval from others. They are not exalting themselves like hypocrites do by flaunting their credentials and honorific titles.

C. .16-22 Be honest.

The scribes and Pharisees tried to weasel out of their vows/promises by claiming that certain vows were non-binding.

.20-22 Jesus asserts that all swearing by the altar or by the temple or by heaven itself is binding. A person could not get out of an oath by claiming that he did not swear in a binding way. This kind of non-binding oath-taking was a means of committing fraud and deceit.

You really should not need to take an oath to affirm a promise.

*Mt 5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all:*

*James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.*

When you make a promise, keep it. Don't try to weasel out of a commitment by appealing to fine distinctions or technicalities. That's what hypocrites do. They specialize in deceiving others, which means that they use fraud to get what they want or to get out of an obligation.

D. Adopt the right priorities.

.23-24 Focus on the "weightier matters of the law," not the relatively unimportant aspects of religious life. Hypocrites tend to focus on getting all the details right while neglecting the underlying meaning and purpose of those details.

**E.g.**, the parable of the Good Samaritan—the Levite and priest neglected the needy man. Extremely religious people lacking kindness, a basic obligation.

.23b “these you ought to have done without leaving the others undone.” I.e., it was right to tithe off the increase of their herb garden, but it was wrong to neglect the more important things. So we must be concerned about the finer points of the law, but not to the neglect of the weightier elements of the faith.

It’s a mistake to suppose that all aspects of religious life are equally important. In Christianity, some things are more important than others. Some doctrines are more significant and some less so. We should make sure that we are faithful in the most important things and try to be right on the details as well.

The most important matters in Christianity are those that are closest to the Gospel message. We often call these the fundamentals of the faith. There is virtually no flexibility or wiggle room on the fundamental, essential doctrines of the Christian faith. E.g., the deity of Christ, resurrection of Jesus, inspiration of the Bible, salvation by grace through faith—these are the “weightier matters” of the faith, without which there would be no Christianity. The center of our attention should be on these doctrines.

But we also recognize 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> level teaching. We recognize that some things are matters of indifference—adiaphora.

On the less important matters, we can be somewhat flexible. In areas where we don’t have a clear “thus saith the Lord,” we can be tolerant and charitable toward other opinions. That’s what Romans 14 is all about.

Hypocrites major on the minors. Sincere Christians major on the majors and try to be charitable and flexible on the minors.

E. .26 Replace hypocrisy with sincerity.

Psalm 51:6 *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, ...*

1. .26 Clean up the inside of the cup so that the outside can also be clean. Deal with internal, heart issues. Get your heart right first, and then worry about external issues. Get the log out of your own eye first.

2. How do you clean up what is on the inside of the cup?

1 John 1:7 ... *the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

1Jo 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Repent of the sin of hypocrisy. Confess it as sin and change your attitudes and behavior.

3. .27 Don't be like a whitewashed tomb. Inside should be full of light and life, not death and decay.

So this requires a little self-evaluation. Is the inside of the cup clean or dirty? Are there dead men's bones in my heart? Is my heart full of light and love or full of death and decay?

Psalm 139:23–24 *Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my thoughts; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.*

What will happen if a hypocrite prays that prayer sincerely? He will recognize his own hypocrisy. He'll see his wicked ways and he'll repent.

F. .33 Escape the damnation of hell.

1. Hypocrisy leads to hell because hypocrites are not sincere; they are play acting. They claim to believe what they don't actually believe. In the worst cases, religion is nothing but a show, a pretense, a façade.
2. Notice the rather severe/strict/blunt language Jesus uses here.
  - a) Hypocrites are not entering the kingdom.
  - b) They are blind leaders of the blind.
  - c) They and their followers are children of hell and receive greater damnation.
  - d) They are fools who are full of extortion, excess, dead men's bones, and decay.
  - e) They are serpents and vipers full of hypocrisy and iniquity (ἀνομία—lawlessness).

These are characteristics of unsaved people.

If you are guilty of the kind of hypocrisy described here, you are in danger of the damnation of hell.

3. A radical transformation is needed to change a hypocrite into a sincere believer. That radical transformation happens through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus.

The real solution to hypocrisy is salvation. When you get saved, God cleans up the inside. That inner cleansing leads to changes in our behavior. Sincerity replaces hypocrisy once we get saved.

If your religion is all a show, nothing but a mask or a costume you put on to make a good impression on others, you need to repent and believe the Gospel.

4. If you are already a believer, you don't have to worry about the damnation of hell, but you do need to avoid chastisement or discipline. Hypocrisy is a sin that we must avoid. If we allow it in our lives, we are asking for God's fatherly discipline.

Hypocrites are play actors who "say, and do not do" (.3). They shamelessly commit fornication and then speak at prayer breakfasts. They talk the talk but do not walk the walk. They put on religion like a mask or a costume; they act religious when it suits them, when it gets them what they want.

Hypocrites don't really care about the law, salvation, the needy, prayer, the truth, tithing, or weighty spiritual matters. Within, they are full of dead men's bones, uncleanness, extortion, and excess. They are serpents and vipers even though they appear to be righteous before men. Ultimately, their religion is a fraud, a charade, and they are in danger of the damnation of hell.

The only solution to that kind of hypocrisy is genuine, heart-felt repentance. .26— cleanse what is within so the outside may be clean also. That cleansing comes through the blood of Christ.

Even true Christians can, at times, be hypocritical. Hypocrisy is one of those sins of the spirit that may be nearly invisible to others. People see our exterior, public behavior, and they assume that our religion is real. But for hypocrites, a fine exterior conceals a foul interior.

Even if you are a Christian, you may need to clean up the inside of the cup. We must regularly confess our sins to God and ask for forgiveness. We must seek to be honest and sincere in our Christian faith. Our talk and our walk should be consistent.

If you are a saved hypocrite, you need to repent of that sin. You need a good dose of humility and sincerity. Clean up the inside of the cup so that the outside will be clean as well.