

THE HYPOCRITES IN THE CHURCH

Introduction

1. Somebody said, “An excuse is a skin of a reason stuffed with a lie”¹. There is one excuse we often hear from the lips of non-Christians and Christians for their disobedience...
 - a. A non-Christian says, “I’m not going to become a Christian because the church is full of hypocrites”.
 - b. A Christian says, “You won’t catch me going to church any more because I don’t want to associate with a bunch of hypocrites”.
2. Before we comment on these excuses, let’s clear up a few things:
 - a. What a hypocrite is: A hypocrite is, basically, an actor; it is someone who role-plays; it is someone who is pretending to be someone he is not. In the content of Christianity, it is someone who is pretending to be a Christian; someone who pretends to be following the teachings of Christ, but, in his private life, is not. Here are three examples of hypocrisy:
 - 1) Hypocrisy is pretending to holy and righteous when you are actually filled with uncleanness and unrighteousness (Matthew 23:27-28).
 - 2) Hypocrisy is criticising others for what you yourself do (Luke 13:14-16).
 - 3) Hypocrisy is seeking to avoid the law via technicalities (Matthew 15:3-8).
 - b. What a hypocrite is not: A hypocrite is not someone who once did bad things in the past and has now renounced them. Teaching your children not to lie does not make you a hypocrite because you used to be a liar yourself. Turning from sin is repentance, and God commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30; Acts 2:38; 3:19). Christians are people who have repented of their sins. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
 - c. To say that the church is “full” of hypocrites is a statement that is simply not true. There are certainly some hypocrites, but to say the church is “full” of hypocrites is slanderous and an insult to sincere Christians.
3. Here, then, is a message for (i) the hypocrite, (ii) the church, and (iii) those that refuse to obey the Lord (non-Christians and Christians) on the basis of the church being full of hypocrites.

I. TO THE HYPOCRITE

- A. There are many reasons a person might associate with sincere Christians without truly being devoted to Christ: habit, family ties, social framework, etc. As with the Pharisees, **hypocrisy is often camouflaged by superficial godliness and piety.**
- B. By pretending to be something you’re not, you are actually an obstacle to unbelievers: There were hypocritical Jews that taught others not steal, commit adultery, worship false gods, but done those very things themselves. However, as is often the case, **their hypocrisy was evident to unbelievers, and it gave them cause to speak against God and His religion** (Romans 2:1-24). The world may resent true faith, but it loathes a hypocrite.
- C. You aren’t fooling anyone but yourself. If you are a hypocrite, the chances are that both believers and unbelievers suspect it, if not know it; whether they vocalize it or not. So you’re not really fooling anyone². But **even if you are fooling people, you cannot fool God** (Psalms 94:11; 139:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

¹ Billy Sunday.

² The hypocrite may ask, “If people in my congregation know I’m a hypocrite, then why haven’t they exposed me?” It isn’t within the scope of this lesson to discuss this point, but here are a few reasons: lack of proof, cowardness, or perhaps because they themselves are hypocrites.

II. TO THE CHURCH

- A. Hypocrisy involving clearly established sin is subject to discipline (Galatians 2:11-13).
1. Hypocrisy is a corrupting influence within the church (1 Corinthians 5:6). The super-pious are often harsh, critical and demoralizing; their commitment is casual and they foster an attitude of slackness and minimal involvement. Good men like Barnabas can be caught up in the subtlety of hypocrisy.
 2. Hypocrisy also hurts the church's reputation in the community. Uncorrected hypocrisy ruins the church's influence.
- B. A hypocrite needs incentive and opportunity to repent, and exposure and discipline affords such.

III. TO THOSE WHO REFUSE TO OBEY THE LORD BECAUSE OF HYPOCRITES

- A. There are unbelievers who refuse to obey the gospel on the basis that "the church is full of hypocrites", and there are those Christians (once a member of a local congregation) that refuse to obey the Lord's command to assemble with the saints on the same basis: "the church is full of hypocrites".
- B. This rationale is full of problems:
1. **It is foolish:** Would you totally reject your parents and leave home because of a hypocritical brother or sister? Why would you sacrifice your own blessings as a son or daughter to siblings you detest? Does the hypocrisy of others make one's own rebellion right? Likewise, it is foolish to sacrifice one's blessings as a child of God to a minority of insincere hypocrites.
 2. **It is irrational:** To disobey the Lord (in refusing to obey the gospel or to assemble with other Christians) in order to avoid a few hypocrites only to spend eternity in hell with them, just isn't rational thinking!
 3. **It is arrogant:** When someone says, "the church is full of hypocrites", it is often said in condescension. "I'm too good to associate with them."
 4. **It is irresponsible:** It is basically a refusal to fulfill your responsibility toward the Lord by blaming others (a sign of immaturity).
 5. **It is inconsistent:** Do you avoid going to work or sporting events because of the presence of hypocritical fans? Do you refuse to vote for a political party because of a few hypocrites within it?
 6. **It is hypocritical:** If you reject Christianity for its hypocritical adherents:
 - a. If you believe a particular Christian's standards are false, then you are a hypocrite by saying that you reject the person rather than his standards. Consider: I am against communism because of its principles, not because of a few hypocritical communist who profit from it.
 - b. If you believe a particular Christian's standards are true, then you are a hypocrite by your own failure to do what is right.
- C. The bottom line: To refuse to obey the Lord on the basis that "the church is full of hypocrites" is an excuse to avoid doing what is right. What you need to do? Either...
1. Be honest: Admit that you just don't want to do what the Lord says.
 2. Do what is right: Set the example of obedience and sincerity for the hypocrites to follow.

Conclusion

1. Jesus warns: "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (Matthew 18:7).
2. Both the hypocrite and the one who uses him for an excuse will be lost.