



“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee,” Matthew 11:24.

Jesus Teaches on Hypocrisy

Lesson Aim: to stimulate believers to live honest, separated lives in the midst of a crooked and hypocritical generation.

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Hypocrite! The very term has a repulsive sound to our ears. It is related to all that is bad and undesirable. To call a person a hypocrite is a great insult. Hypocrisy, however, is a major sin in the present generation.

Just what is hypocrisy? How do you recognize it in your own life? What can you do about it? How can you find forgiveness of it? Those are questions that pour in upon the serious student of the subject. Fortunately, Jesus spoke on the subject of hypocrisy. Today's study examines one such instance of His teachings.

The aim of today's lesson is “to stimulate believers to live honest, separated lives in the midst of a crooked and hypocritical generation.” Each reader should keep an eye turned upon himself as he studies. It will be easy to recognize hypocrisy in someone he does not like, but the deceitful sin will hide from the examination of his personal life unless he searches with the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Study carefully. As you study, ask God to speak to you. As He speaks, acknowledge His voice and respond to His direction. The study could thereby become the most profitable exercise of your spiritual life as God speaks to you.

I. DEFINITION OF HYPOCRISY

The English terms, “hypocrisy, hypocrite,” come from a Greek word, **hupokrites**, which means “stage-playing, acting out a part, pretending.” It

was a proper word used to describe an actor, performing the part of a character in a drama. In that sense, the word was honorable.

Not all play-acting is done under circumstances which indicate that a person is pretending. Sometimes a person will pretend that he is someone he is not, doing it with an intent to deceive. That may be described as **hupokrisis** in a bad sense. **Hupokrisis** becomes evil only when it has an intent to deceive. There is so much deception in the world, however, that the term has only a meaning of evil intent in our language.

Jesus reserved His severest denunciations for those whom He called hypocrites. They were men who were very scrupulous in keeping detailed rituals of religion but who knew no real spiritual content to their faith. The sin of such people was compounded in that it was an effort to deceive God as well as man. No wonder Jesus denounced them.

No one appreciates a hypocrite. Hypocrisy may be a beautiful sin—it puts forth its best face—but it is disgusting when it is discovered. The pretender may expect honor and advancement, but the Bible warns, “. . . **the hypocrite's hope shall perish,**” Job 8:13.

It is possible to fool some people all of the time, and all people some of the time, but God is never deceived. “**Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,**” Hebrews 4:13. Beware!

II. EXPRESSION OF HYPOCRISY, 11:16-19

Jesus said that a hypocritical generation reminded Him of children at play. Some wanted to play “funeral,” but the others would not lament. Some wanted to play “wedding,” but the rest would not dance. John the Baptist lived a life of austerity, eating locusts and wild honey for his livelihood. Jesus entered into homes and ate and drank as other men. Of John the Baptist, opponents said, “He is crazy; he has a demon or else he would eat as we do.” Of Jesus, they said, “He is given to gluttony and excessive drinking.”

A hypocrite lacks real content to his life. Jesus said that a hypocrite was like a child “playing.” What an apt description! A child playing “cowboys and Indians” is more concerned with the imitation than with the reality. A stick becomes a formidable foe. He has super powers to overcome all his enemies. An adult may be amused in watching a child at his make-believe play.

The hypocrite is also play-acting. The tragedy is that he intends to

deceive others in order that he may profit. It would be amusing to God, if the act were not so serious. Because there are eternal matters at stake, hypocrisy is of no amusement in the eyes of God. It is deadly sin.

Take warning! It is so easy for you to make your religion a game. To be bodily present in God's house when the spirit's interest is elsewhere is play-acting. To sing a hymn of praise while the spirit knows no delight in God is hypocrisy. God deliver us from a religion which is all form and ritual without spirit and reality. Put content in your worship and service.

A hypocrite finds fault with all but himself, verses 17-19. He will join in the game with others (as the children playing in the market place) only if it is the game he wants to play. As a child, he is impetuous and changing. Some times he does not want to play your game. Some times he does not want to play at all. He never assumes responsibility for faults or failures of the games. He is above blame.

John the Baptist lived a very austere life. His garments were plain — camels' hair. His food was by no means exquisite—locusts and wild honey. People rejected him because of that. On the other hand, Jesus was a part of the common life of His day. He ate food like all the other people ate. He shared their lives. He was one with His peers. They rejected Him for being one with them as they had rejected John for not being one with them. To the hypocrite, everyone is at fault except himself.

A hypocrite does not wait for the verdict of time. When Jesus said, “Wisdom is justified of her children,” He meant, “What a wise person does proves he is right.” As is commonly said today, “Time will tell.” Was John the Baptist from God? Was Jesus from God? Look at the end of their ministries. Time revealed from whence they both came.

Keep in mind: the play is not over. Do not judge the book by the first chapter nor the drama by one act. Give time for God to work out His purposes in the world, and he who is of God will be exonerated.

In the meantime, take heed that you do not play at religion. No outward semblance can substitute for inward verity. Never put rituals above reality. If you refuse to play any “game” except the one you can play best, you will never be pleasing to God.

III. JUDGMENT 11:20-24

The basis of judgment is the revelation which has been received. Jesus rebuked the cities of His day for their rejection of His message. Those were cities “wherein most of his mighty works were done.” They had no excuse for their rejection of the Messiah and His message.

Twice Jesus spoke of it being “more tolerable” for ancient cities when the day of judgment comes than for the cities in which He ministered. To be “more tolerable” means to be easier, more bearable, that one will fare better than the other. Why? The later cities had much more evidence of God's work among them than had the earlier cities.

Works done in Chorazin brought no repentance. If the same works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, “they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” Capernaum had been the scene of at least seven healing miracles performed by Jesus, plus other works and signs, but she had not responded in faith. Even a city as wicked as Sodom (whose perversions included “sodomy”) would have repented, if she had witnessed a ministry like Capernaum did. The city of Capernaum therefore, will receive a more strict judgment than will Sodom.

Many people wonder about those who have not heard the gospel. He will judge them too, but His judgment is always according to truth and takes into consideration the amount of knowledge which a person has received. The tragedy with the hypocrite is that he shows that he has received enough knowledge of the truth to imitate it. He will be without excuse.

The scope of judgment is broad—including all people. Time makes no difference in judgment. Ancient cities like Sodom will be judged. Citizens of cities which were in Jesus' day will be judged. People who live today will be judged. It matters not when one lives, he will account to God.

Geography makes no difference in judgment. Sodom was located at the extreme south end of the Dead Sea in southeast Palestine. Tyre and Sidon were located on the Mediterranean coast to the northwest of Palestine. Chorazin and Capernaum were located on the Sea of Galilee in northern Palestine. Each must account to God.

Religious affiliation does not keep one from judgment. Tyre and Sidon, with Sodom, were pagan cities. Chorazin and Capernaum were Jewish cities, steeped in the religion of the Old Testament. Each will account to the same God. It is true that all men, of all geographic areas, of all national affiliations, of all racial strains, of all language groups will account to the God of the universe, He whom Christians call “Our Father which art in heaven.” You will be among those who stand before Him in judgment.

It does no good to reject the truth. It will triumph. **“Wisdom is justified of her children,”** verse 19. Men may reject Jesus. Men may pretend devotion to Jesus. How will they fare when every knee bows, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord? Do not play the part of a pretender. Judgment will reveal the hypocrites to their everlasting shame.

IV. ALTERNATIVE TO HYPOCRISY, 11:25-26

The alternative to hypocrisy is reality. Some may pretend loyalty to God, devotion to Jesus, and knowledge of the holy. Why pretend? God is available in reality!

“ . . . Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” Do not accept the counterfeit when the real thing is available.

God is known by revelation, not by carnal human wisdom. “Babes” can, therefore, understand what the “wise and prudent” do not know. God reveals His treasures to those who are willing to receive them and respond in faith to them.

The “wise” are people with naturally keen intellects. The “prudent” are those who are able to place things side by side and draw a conclusion. Both wisdom and prudence are virtues of human wisdom. They are no guarantee of knowledge of divine things. **“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,”** I Corinthians 2:14.

The “wise” and the “prudent” might be considered the scientist and the philosopher in today's education system. The scientist cannot “test” God in his laboratory. The philosopher cannot “reason” God into existence by his intellect. God is known by revelation. Spiritual truth is not limited by fleshly ability or inability.

Some students are reared in a Bible-believing home and a Bible-teaching church. Then they go away from home to the university to study. Immediately they meet Dr. So-and-so, the scientist, who openly rejects the doctrines of the Bible and perhaps even the existence of God. The student is shaken. “Surely,” he thinks, “this learned man knows the truth. Maybe I have been duped by religious teachings which I have received.” No need to worry. A specialist in science, or any other discipline of study, is not qualified to speak in the field of religion. He may be a genius in one area and a fool in the other. Do not let your faith be shaken by the unbelief of another. Remember the words of Jesus, “. . . thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

Who are the “babes” to whom God reveals divine truths? They are people of any age (not just infants) who are willing to be taught. If your heart is open to God, He will show you the way of truth. A grammar school graduate, with an open Bible and heart before God, can know more about the

truth of God than does the university professor whose mind is closed against divine revelation.

You can have reality in religion. God is real. Forgiveness is real. The Holy Spirit's ministry is real. What a tragic waste it is for one to spend his life pretending. Pretense is not necessary. Reality is available.

Flee from the hateful sin of hypocrisy. Keep up your guard, for all are tempted to pretension at various times. Men copy only what is valuable. You can have the real item. God loves you. He will make Himself known to you as you are available to Him. Do not sell your privilege of knowing Him personally. Acquaint yourself with Him; permit the Lord Jesus to live His life through you, and you will have no need to pretend.

Questions

1. What is hypocrisy?
2. Why do people despise a hypocrite?
3. What does Job 8:13 mean to you?
4. How did Jesus describe hypocrites as children at play?
5. What did Jesus mean when He said, "Wisdom is justified of her children"?
6. When will all hypocrisy be revealed and rewarded?
7. Who are the wise and prudent?
8. Who are the babes who know God?
9. By what method is God known?
10. How can you have reality religion?