

# You're Probably Not a Hypocrite

BY DAVID POSEY

No matter what people say, you're probably not a hypocrite.

One of the favorite bombs that unbelievers lob toward churches is that “they are full of hypocrites.” They say this because they have undoubtedly met a few people who call themselves “Christians” but do very unChristlike things.

And, of course, it's much easier to charge others with hypocrisy when you aren't expecting to be held to any standard of morality beyond what the society imposes.

Even Christians, at times, feel they are being hypocritical when they are probably not. We need to define the biblical term “hypocrite.” It comes from the Greek word, *hupokrites*, the word applied to stage actors in the first century. Vines says,

...it was a custom for Greek and Roman actors to speak in large masks with mechanical devices for augmenting the force of the voice; hence the word became used metaphorically of a dissembler, a hypocrite. (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

Think about that use of the word. It describes not only an actor, but one who speaks behind a mask, with his voice altered by a machine. In other words, he or she becomes a different person, depending on the occasion. The term is found only in the synoptic gospels and is used only by Jesus — 15 times in Matthew and in Mark 7:6; Luke 6:42, 11:44 (in some manuscripts), 12:56 and 13:15.

Many Christians find themselves in despair because they think they are hypocrites when they sin. Yet, I John 1:8 says that if we say we have no sin, we are liars. If hypocrisy is triggered by sin, and we all sin, then we are all hypocrites.

But that's not what the term means. When Jesus, in Matthew 23, charged the Jews with being hypocrites, he did it because they were pretending to be something they were not. Listen to Matthew 23:2-6,

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues...

What was their sin? It wasn't a failing due to weakness of the flesh, for which they were sorry. Their sin was turning the religion of God into a stage upon which they acted. They put on a mask to fool others into thinking they were something they were not. Matthew 23:23-15,

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

If you do that — if you are putting on a mask for Sunday, but are a different person on Monday — you may be a hypocrite. And, as you can see, that's a terrible thing to be; Jesus says you're “a child of hell.”

In my 50 plus years of being around members of churches, I have met very few people who meet the “hypocrite” test. I've met a few, and they were easy to spot. And I'm sure I missed a few (I'm more than OK with that).

The few I've met were men or women who clearly were putting on a show for the church. One young lady, for example, would only attend services when her folks were in town and would always come for two successive Sundays before they came. Why? So we wouldn't say, "Oh, Susie, it's good to see you; we've missed you." She was wearing a mask to fool her parents.

Another was a man who flaunted his possessions, cheated on his wife, always came in late and sat in front. Yet, when called to account by men in the church (we had no elders) he would read spiritual poems or recite hymns.

I don't want to be crude, but hypocrisy, when displayed like that, makes you want to throw up.

Jesus said it this way,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. *Matthew 23:25- 28*

So, don't get down on yourself when you sin — if you feel guilty about it and confess, you're not a hypocrite. You're a human being who needs grace and knows it.

And when people say that the church is "full of hypocrites" simply ask, "so, how would you define 'hypocrite'"? And then tell them the little story on the next page.