

Am I a Hypocrite?

R. Stanley, 15 February 2021

Hypocrisy is the worst of sins but least condemned. Nothing hinders holiness like hypocrisy. Jesus condemned every possible sin and the ones dominantly prevailing in His times. But He pronounced “**woe**” only on the hypocrites (Mt 23). He never said, “Woe unto you murderers, thieves or adulterers!”

The word “hypocrite” is based on the Greek theatrical word which means “actor.” Yes, hypocrites are those who pretend to be someone they are not. In those days actors wore masks on their faces, with hidden megaphones in them so that they could be heard. So a hypocrite is one who wears a false face.

Hypocrisy a venom

Satan is the master hypocrite. The first recorded words of hypocrisy in the Bible came out of his foul mouth. He masqueraded as the wellwisher of our first parents and ditched them (Gen 3:1-5). Basically he is the originator and promoter of all hypocrisy through human beings. That’s why Jesus called him the “father” of lies “from the beginning” (Jn 8:44). This old serpent injected its venom of hypocrisy into the veins of Adam and Eve and they became the first man and woman to play hypocrisy in human history. Look at their dishonest answers to God by blameshifting for their disobedience (Gen 3:8-13). Yes, hypocrisy is the oldest sin that was committed to cover up unbelief and disobedience. A salty spring cannot bring forth sweet water (Js 3:11,12). The first son of the first parents played hypocrisy while answering God after he murdered his brother (Gen 4:9). Since that day every man and woman in the world is a hypocrite. Apostle Paul succinctly presented this observation in Romans 3:4, “Indeed, God is true but every man a liar.” This means that we all have atleast traces of hypocrisy compared to God’s absolute truthfulness.

An age-old sin

The Book of Job is the earliest written book in the Bible. It is in this book the word “hypocrite” occurs maximum number of times (8) in the Old Testament. Here are the confessions of all the four friends of Job: Bildad, “The hope of the hypocrite shall perish” (Job 8:13); Eliphaz, “The company of hypocrites will be barren” (15:34); Zophar, “The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment” (20:5); Elihu, “The hypocrite should not reign, lest the people be ensnared” (34:30). Job mentions the hellishness of hypocrisy four times (13:16; 17:8; 27:8; 36:13).

God’s serious view

The population of outright hypocrites is on unprecedented increase not only in the world but also in the Church. Prophet Isaiah spoke of the everlasting burnings that would devour hypocrites in “Zion” (Isa 33:14). The treasurer of the twelve had

been a habitual hypocrite (Jn 12:4-6). He betrayed his hypocrisy when he betrayed his Master (Lk 22:48). His hypocritical kiss sealed his eternal damnation. Wounds from friends are faithful whereas kisses from enemies are hypocritical (Prov 27:6). It's to warn God's people against "hypocritical" kisses while greeting one another, Paul repeatedly spoke of "holy" kiss (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). No wonder the first sin judged in the early Church was hypocrisy. The verdict on Mr. & Mrs. Ananias was not for holding back a part of the sale proceeds of their land but for giving a false impression to the servants of God (Acts 5:1-10). Hypocrisy means partnership with Satan (v3). God seems to be unusually merciful to us; otherwise there would be daily funerals in our Churches. In general, we the older people are more hypocritical than the youngsters. That's why the "young men" were the undertakers! (vv 6,10). God won't mind allowing such incidents in the Church if that's what would restore "holy fear" amidst us (v11).

Hypocrisy vs. Honesty

Revivalist Leonard Ravenhill (1907-1994) speaks of three persons living in each of us: (1) The one we think we are; that's *pride*, (2) The one others think we are; that's *hypocrisy*, (3) The one God knows we are; that's the *truth*. We must constantly and consistently work in our life to bring (1) and (2) to synchronise with (3). The hypocrite is a double person, natural and artificial. Hypocrisy is the opposite of honesty. Growing in holiness means less and less of hypocrisy and more and more of honesty. Without laying aside hypocrisy, we cannot grow in the Lord even if we love Him devotedly and study the Bible diligently (1 Pet 2:1-3). "Ascending into the hill of the Lord" is illustrative of growing in holiness (Psa 24:3,4). One condition for this hill-climbing is "speaking the truth in the heart" (15:1,2).

Heart of the matter

Hypocrisy is a heart disease. It's not easily identifiable. Hence the challenge: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" (Jer 17:9). Deceit proceeds from our heart (Mk 7:21,22). It is self-deception (Gal 6:3). That's why David said, "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there's no deceit" (Psa 32:2). His aversion to hypocrisy is noteworthy. He tells God, "He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence" (Psa 101:7). Hypocrisy is the contradiction between thought and word. So also, it's the contradiction between word and deed. The first requisite to enjoy the "Peace of God" and experience the "God of Peace" with us is to think what's "true" (Phil 4:7-9).

Pharisaism

The first time Jesus used the word, "hypocrisy," was in the context of religious exercises. He said, "When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites ... When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites ... When you do a charitable deed, do not be

like the hypocrites" (Mt 6:5, 16,2). In the Gospels, the words "Pharisee" and "hypocrite" are nearly synonymous. As we said at the beginning of this article, a hypocrite is a pretender. Jesus called the "leaven of the Pharisees" as "hypocrisy" (Lk 12:1b). He referred to their teaching. Hypocrisy is a pandemic, worse than Corona, which has invaded every section of the society, more so the Church. We have Lutheran Pharisaism, Anglican Pharisaism, Methodist Pharisaism, Baptist Pharisaism, Pentecostal Pharisaism, and so on! It's all because we as members of various Churches have forgotten a vital truth that all things are naked before God and nothing is hidden from His sight (Heb 4:13). Christ as the Head of the Church sent multifarious messages to the seven Churches (Rev 2 & 3). But the one truth common to them all is this: "All the Churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (2:23). He has "seven eyes" which are like a "flame of fire" (5:6; 2:18; Zech 4:10).

El-Roi

Revival has become the common subject of Prayer all over the world. The 8th Chapter of Zechariah is God's message for Revival and Restoration. He says, "Again in these days I am determined to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not fear" (v15). In the very next two verses, He lists out four foremost things He expects us to do: First, "Speak each man the truth to his neighbour." Fourth, "Do not love a false oath." We have so many beautiful names for our ministries: *Jesus Calls! Jesus Redeems! Jesus Lives! Jesus Loves!* And so on. I suggest the name, "*Jesus Watches!*", or even better, "*Jesus Weeps!*", if you plan to start a new ministry. One of the oldest revelations of God was what came to Hagar: "El-Roi" = "You-are-the-God-who-sees-me!" (Gen 16:13). Each of us need this personal revelation if at all we desire to be delivered from shameful hypocrisy. While writing these lines I am reminded of the open-heart surgery I underwent in 1996. I have never seen my heart but my surgeon has seen it and handled it. So also the Great Physician-cum-Surgeon of Gilead! (Jer 8:22). The Bible is His Scanner and His Scalpel (Js 1:23-25; Heb 4:12). He would skillfully remove the multiple blocks of hypocrisy to facilitate free flow of Christ's life-giving blood.

Ten Woes

While dealing with the unpopular but universal subject of hypocrisy, we cannot but make a reference to Matthew 23 and Luke 11. These two chapters give us 10 "woes" pronounced by Christ on the hypocrites. They were the "Scribes" and the "Pharisees" of His time. The Scribes were lawyers and scholars who copied, taught and interpreted the Jewish Law. The Pharisees were a religious sect in Palestine overly concerned with fulfilling the literal details of the Law but insensitive to its spiritual significance. Here are the 10 "woes" thrown by our Lord on these two groups which represent religious leadership —

- (1) Woe for preaching lofty things, thus demanding too much from the people, but not practising even a bit of it (Mt 23:1-5; Lk 11:46).
- (2) Woe for lusting for special seats, titles and greetings (Mt 23:6-12; Lk 11:43).
- (3) Woe for not letting people enjoy the privileges and blessings of the Kingdom of God even though we know about them very well. i.e. Keeping people ignorant of their rights (Mt 23:13; Lk 11:52).
- (4) Woe for cheating the poor and helpless widows by long prayers. Exploiting the helplessness and desperateness of people (Mt 23:14).
- (5) Woe for being enthusiastic in adding more and more members to our group/ congregation, but not investing ourselves enough in building them up. They simply learn our corrupt ways (Mt 23:15).
- (6) Woe for teaching foolish/meaningless traditions to people (Mt 23:16-22).
- (7) Woe for being strict with the letter of the Law but leaving its spirit (Mt 23:23,24; Lk 11:41,42). No concern for the poor (Lk 11:41).
- (8) Woe for superficial piety without inner purity (Mt 23:25,26; Lk 11:39,40).
- (9) Woe for outward showiness without a vibrant inner life (Mt 23:27,28; Lk 11:44). “A name that you are alive, but actually dead!” (See Rev 3:1).
- (10) Woe for hating and killing “true” prophets who expose the real condition of individuals and institutions (Mt 23:29-35; Lk 11:47-51).

Have you noticed what Jesus said at the end of pronouncing these 10 “woes?” “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Mt 23:36)

Pulpit hypocrisy

These Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day are comparable to Preachers, Pastors and Leaders of the Church today. We teach others but not ourselves. This pulpit hypocrisy is simply too common (Rom 2:17-23). The non-Christian public takes advantage of this to accuse and abuse Christians (v24). We Preachers must repent of the “Do-what-I-say-and-not-what-I-do” philosophy (Mt 23:2-4). A hypocrite preaches by the yard, but practices by the inch! Holding the Bible in one hand but compromising with thieves and adulterers is detestable to God (Psa 50:16-21). Cold preachers make bold sinners. God anoints only those pulpiteers who tremble at His Word (Isa 66:1,2). The craze for clerical titles has robbed us of spiritual enlightenment (Mt 23:6,7). Too many of us have become blind guides of the blind (vv16-22). We have a squint eye. We seem to have the tongue of an angel but the heart of a devil! It’s easy to throw woes on folks (Isa 5). Let’s say, “Woe is me!” (Isa 6). Only then our hypocritical tongue would be cleansed by the heavenly fire! “Whitewashing the pump won’t make the water pure,” said D. L. Moody (1837-1899). When the pulpits are purged of hypocrisy, the pew-dwellers will no more be mere sermon-tasters (Ezek 33:31). Another thing: Our ministerial reports are not even half truth. Exaggeration has become our culture.

Hypocritical Leaders

Hypocrisy disqualifies leadership. King Amaziah appeared as one who was right in the sight of God, but his heart was not “loyal” (2 Chr 25:2,14,27). Jonah was a hypocritical Prophet. He prophesied without a compassionate heart (Jon 4:2,9-11). Nationalism and personal prestige were dominant in his ministry (4:2a). One of Job’s friends said, “A hypocrite should not reign lest the people be ensnared” (Job 34:30). While retiring from his kingship, David told the nextliner his son, “My son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts” (1 Chr 28:9). Leaders, especially Preachers, must take non-stop effort to weed out all forms of hypocrisy from their lives (Mal 2:6,7). There was no deceit in the mouth of Jesus the Master Teacher (Isa 53:9; 1 Pet 2:22). Apostle Paul instructed that even deacons must not be “double-tongued” (1 Tim 3:8). Our committee meetings are tarnished by hypocrisy as we compromise on our convictions for convenience. Hypocrites are sure to miss God’s guidance and will be going merry-go-round unable to arrive at concrete decisions (Prov 11:3). Discussions without direction from Above!

Paul’s honesty

Let’s be challenged by the men of God who were known for their faithfulness: Abraham (Neh 9:8), Moses (Num 12:7; Heb 3:5), David (1 Sam 22:14), Hezekiah (2 Chr 31:20,21), Daniel (Dan 6:4), Paul (1 Cor 4:2-4; 1 Tim 1:12), Timothy (1 Cor 4:17), Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Onesimus (Col 4:9), Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12) and Antipas (Rev 2:13). Can God add my name to this list of twelve? I doubt. Among these men, the one who did his utmost to be absolutely honest and totally free from hypocrisy was Apostle Paul. He was healed of his Pharisaical blindness like Gamaliel (Acts 9:17,18; 5:34). Look at the areas where he was honest —

- He was honest about his *struggles* (Rom 7:13-24). A faithful man does not boast of his so-called goodness (Prov 20:6). Paul was open not only about his spiritual struggles but also about his mental worries and emotional conflicts (Phil 2:27; 2 Cor 1:8-10).
- He was honest about his *weaknesses* (2 Cor 12:7-10; 1 Cor 2:3).
- He was honest in his *claims*: (a) Prayer life (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1,2), (b) Correspondence (2 Cor 10:9-11), (c) Travel plans (Rom 1:10; 15:32; Acts 16:6-10), (d) Troubles, persecutions and sufferings (2 Cor 11:22-33), (e) Tireless labour (1 Cor 15:10).
- He was honest in *relationships* (2 Cor 6:11; 7:2,3).
- He was honest in *financial matters* (2 Cor 8:18-23; Acts 20:30-35). The only fundraising project he launched was for the poor (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:25,26,31). Several times he sacrificed his own rights in money matters (1 Cor 9:11,12). While teaching on tax payment, he appealed to the “conscience” (Rom 13:5-8).
- He was honest and faithful in *preaching* (2 Cor 2:17). He instructed Timothy to pass on the truths to “faithful” men (2 Tim 2:2).
- He was honest in *reporting* (Rom 15:17-19).
- He was honest about his *ignorance* (1 Cor 13:9; 2 Cor 12:1-4).
- He was honest about his *past* (1 Tim 1:12-16; 1 Cor 15:7-9).

Comparing myself with Paul, I wonder whether I'm scoring high in hypocrisy or honesty! Only he who holds a Post-doctorate in Honesty like Paul can confront Apostles like Peter and Barnabas for hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-14). Beware of criticizing Preachers casually! "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Mt 7:5). Paul and his associates steered themselves so clearly of hypocrisy that he could testify, "We are well-known to God, and I also trust that we are well-known in your consciences" (2 Cor 5:11). He was dead against glorying "in appearance" and not "in heart" (v12). Beloved, let's walk in the light as God is in the light; only then can we experience continuous cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

Hypocritical relationships

Most of our interpersonal relationship problems are due to hypocrisy. That too mainly because of our hypocritical words. We backbite and spread confidential matters but conclude them with the words, "I'm sharing this for prayer only!" Beloved, we are more responsible for the impression we leave on the hearer than the information we give. Here's David's contemplation about his close friend whose hypocrisy suddenly lifted up its ugly head: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Psa 55:12-14,21; Compare Jer 9:3,8). David's another observation: "They bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly" (Psa 62:4b; 28:3). He decided not to keep company with the hypocrites (26:4b). But the problem is that by the time we identify hypocrisy in our companions, it would be too late! We unlike God go by appearance; He alone knows the hearts. Even a Prophet like Samuel was about to make a blunder (1 Sam 16:6,7). Here's where we need to ask God to fill us with a spirit of discernment (Isa 11:2; 1 Cor 12:10). Solomon compares hypocritical lips to mud pots with silver coating (Prov 26:23).

Handshakes & Hugs

Hypocrites are usually influential people, especially in the Church. They outnumber the honest. This explains why most of our problems stay unsolved for long. Even courts cannot sort them out. Apostle James asks, "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" (Js 4:1a). The answer: "Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there" (3:16). The antidote: "The wisdom that's from above ... without hypocrisy" (v17). Apostle Paul speaks about "love without hypocrisy," and "sincere love" (Rom 12:9; 2 Cor 6:6). Flatterers are splitters (Rom 16:17,18). Handshakes and hugs without a loving heart are dangerously deceptive. When Jehonadab greeted King Jehu, the King asked him, "Is your heart right as my heart is toward your heart?" When the answer was yes, Jehu said, "If it is, give me your hand." Then they rode together in the royal chariot (2 Ki 10:15,16). What a picture!

Hypocritical worship

As I pointed out at the beginning of this message, the word, “hypocrite,” came out of Jesus’ mouth for the first time in the context of devotional disciplines and spiritual exercises (Mt 6). Outward religiosity without inner piety has become the badge of modern Christianity. We have an appearance of godliness without its essence and power (2 Tim 3:5). God hates the noise of our songs, music of our instruments, fatness of our offerings and hugeness of our gatherings when our hearts are not with Him (Am 5:21-24). Jesus calls us “hypocrites” if this is how we worship God (Mt 15:7,8). We are known for hypocritical singing. We sing, “*Sweet hour of prayer,*” but content ourselves with little prayer or no prayer at all! We sing, “*O for a thousand tongues,*” but seldom witness at all! We sing, “*Onward Christian soldiers,*” but wait to be pushed! We sing, “*All to Jesus I surrender,*” but are over-satisfied with tithing! God charges our fasting with a challenge: “When you fasted, did you really fast for Me — for Me?” (Zech 7:5). Self-centred religion! (v6). We go to Church with ultra-modern dresses and costly jewels, as for a fashion parade, with practically no inner beauty (1 Pet 3:3,4).

Gold or Bronze?

Satan rejoices over our worship meetings and religious activities because he knows that we have not worn the very first of the spiritual weapons, namely the belt of “truth” (Eph 6:14). Here lies the reason why we lose many a spiritual battle. David and Solomon had hundreds of “golden” shields (1 Chr 18:7; 1 Ki 10:17). They were meant to reflect the bright sunlight on the enemies’ faces and blind them in battles. When the King of Egypt carried away these shields, King Rehoboam made “bronze” shields instead (2 Chr 12:9,10). This is our condition. We have replaced gold with bronze. We can defeat the enemy only if we reflect the glory of the countenance of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). We cannot dupe Satan! He as the master hypocrite can easily identify hypocrites in battleground. Snakes know the way of snakes!

Wolves as sheep

False teachers are experts in hypocrisy. Sheep cannot easily identify wolves when they come in sheep’s clothing (Mt 7:15). A strong shepherding care alone can safeguard the sheep (Acts 20:28,29). These wolves may not always come from forests. They may rise up even from within the fold (v30). I take such a possibility as a warning for myself. Let me explain why. I have been widely known over four or five decades as a sound Bible Teacher. Unless I continue to take care of myself and my doctrine, I will not be able to save myself and my hearers (1 Tim 4:16). If I am careless, I will become one of Satan’s “angels of light” and deceive my faithful disciples (2 Cor 11:13-15). Departing from virgin faith, and being deceived by doctrines of demons, I would then start “speaking lies in hypocrisy” (1 Tim 4:1,2). “False humility” may mask me (Col 2:18,19). Let us Preachers beware of showy

performance! Religious showmanship is like cotton candy. We must not forget that the deceivers will be deceived themselves (2 Tim 3:13). Paul admonished Timothy to maintain “sincere” and “unhypocritical” faith (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:5).

Conclusion

Hypocrisy is on the steep rise everyday everywhere. The cine world has made us super-specialists in hypocrisy. We consider the reel heroes as real heroes. Photographs are not real. Animation is catchy. There’s hardly any advertisement without a hidden cost or hidden agenda. Advanced nations practise civilized hypocrisy, and underdeveloped countries primitive hypocrisy. Too many national leaders are Herod-like hypocrites (Mt 2:7,8,12). Heaven is the only place totally free of hypocrites! No entry for them there (Rev 22:15). Jesus called hell as the place of the hypocrites (Mt 24:51). Hear the lamentation of David even in his time: “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak with flattering lips and a double heart” (Psa 12:1,2). Is there a way out? Yes! Let me sit under the all-seeing eyes of God recognizing His Omnipresence and Omniscience. Let me tremble before Him because the Day is fast approaching when He would judge my secrets by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16). God expects me to get rid of hypocrisy in all areas of my life, personal or domestic or public, and stay faithful everywhere, everyday and in everything like Moses and the Messiah (Num 12:7b; Heb 3:1-7). Let not my sins follow for judgment but be confessed and repented of now for total cleansing (1 Tim 5:24; 1 Cor 11:31,32).

Back to the title question: “*Am I a hypocrite?*” If I answer, “No,” I am a hypocrite!

*(I urge you, dear reader, to turn to the nearly 170 Bible references
in this article atleast during your second reading.*

The Biblical text is infallible whereas my interpretation or exposition is fallible.

*Read also the article, “Trembling Christian,”
attached to the Online Letter 153 of 9 Jan 2021.)*

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