

Hypocrisy: The Last Sin Of America

Hypocrisy and the Pharisees

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Recently, I did a general search on the Internet on one search engine by typing in the word 'hypocrisy' to see what would come up. Almost instantly, the links to 1380 different articles related to hypocrisy appeared. I thought that was amazing. I also typed in 'sincerity' and half that many came up. That tells you what is on the minds of people.

Here are some examples of the titles that came into sight (I think you will find these interesting and eye opening):

E.U. Farming Groups Accuse U.S. of Hypocrisy.

Alatas Accuses the Nuclear Club of Hypocrisy.

Philip Morris Says Lawsuit is 'Height of Hypocrisy'.

National Coalition For Women Against Tobacco Addresses Tobacco Industry's Hypocrisy.

AR Questions Al Gore's Hollywood Hypocrisy.

Hillary Clinton's Hypocrisy Unveiled.

Greed and Hypocrisy in a Land of Plenty.

Liberal Hypocrisy on Guns and Sex-Ed.

The Hypocrisy of Planned Parenthood.

Right-Wing Hypocrites.

You see there that the idea of hypocrisy is being thrown back and forth by everyone, everywhere, in society. In this sampling of articles, we see many people engaged in some sort of accusation of hypocrisy against another. Fingers are pointing everywhere back and forth. Voices are being raised. People are getting hot under the collar.

There are a couple of meanings for the word 'hypocrite' as defined by *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*.

1. A person who pretends to have virtues, moral or religious beliefs, principles, etc., that he or she does not actually possess, esp. a person whose actions belie stated beliefs.
2. A person who feigns some desirable or publicly approved attitude, esp. one whose private life, opinions, or statements belie his or her public statements.

We see there a secular definition of hypocrisy.

Now let us notice how our society has perverted the idea of hypocrisy to further its own agenda.

According to the March 1, 1999 article, Don't Let the 'Hypocrite' Label Impede Airing of Moral Views by Michael Lempres, an attorney in Washington, our society has distorted its use of the term 'hypocrisy' to the point where "good" is called evil. (i.e., Truth from a hypocrite's mouth negates the truth.)

Hypocrisy is the last sin in America. Murder is still bad but, to read recent newspapers, hypocrisy trumps just about everything else. Not only that, but political opponents can label a person a "hypocrite" by pointing out examples where the person's actions don't match his rhetoric.

The potent political arrow of hypocrisy permitted even Larry Flynt to find a moral high ground. Democratic Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey offered his support to Flynt —a notorious

pornographer who has encouraged violence against women in his Hustler magazine—on the basis that fighting hypocrisy is a good cause. White House spokesman Joe Lockhart treated Flynt's publications as responsible, in contrast to the Washington Times, American Spectator and other conservative-leaning publications.

Today's political weapon of choice requires attacking others as hypocrites for failing to live up to standards that the hypocrite praises publicly. Thus, a man who publicly proclaims that he is pro-family is a hypocrite if evidence surfaces that he had an illicit affair or that he is divorced.

Similarly, a man who proclaims his opposition to abortion is a hypocrite if a former lover had an abortion. In that way, the public person is morally superior, if aware of his own history, he remains silent on public issues that might prove inconsistent with his past actions. In that way, no one may accuse him of boosting positions that he doesn't truly believe.

When actions don't mesh with words, Americans assume that it is the words that are false. It might be better for us all if we accepted that it may be the actions that are "false." As humans, we all fall short of the goals we set for ourselves. That does not mean the goals are false. It simply means that we are all weak. It takes courage every day to meet the goals we set for ourselves.

It also takes courage to stick to our goals after we fall short. This is particularly true for women and men in the public eye who will be called hypocrites if they stick to their goals after falling short. If those men and women do not stick to their goals, we will lower our common expectations and our society will be debased.

We need leaders, even those who have fallen short, to proclaim and defend their moral values. We will all pay the price if the insult of "hypocrite" succeeds in silencing those who would defend values that are difficult to maintain.

As in everything else, the sin of hypocrisy has been elevated so that it is even greater than the sin of murder or adultery or any of the others—according to our society

What is hypocrisy? What is wrong with it? How can we avoid it? These are questions that true Christians should be asking themselves.

In English, a 'hypocrite' is defined as one who deliberately and as habit professes to be good when he is aware that he is not. Synonyms for 'hypocritical' are: insincere, false, two-faced, dishonest, deceitful, deceptive, truth-less, feigned, and the last one is counterfeit. So you can see the relationship between those words and 'hypocrite.' The antonyms are: sincere, heartfelt, genuine and, honest.

The primary motivator of hypocrisy is *pride* ! And, the major resulting sin is that it is a *lie* ! It bears false witness!

In some versions of the Bible, "hypocrisy" and "hypocrite" occur in the Old Testament as the translation from the Hebrew *choneph* or *chaneph*. *Chaneph* means "to cover," "to hide," or "becloud," hence, to pollute, to be polluted or defiled, to make profane, to seduce.

In the KJV and NKJV *chaneph* is translated "hypocrite" eight times in Job.

In all these places in Job, *The Revised Version* has "godless man," or "godless men," or "godless" in the place of 'hypocrisy' (in other translations). To render the meaning of the Hebrew words *choneph* or *chaneph* as 'hypocrisy' and 'hypocrite' is a mistranslation according to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. In its strictest form, it may be considered a mistranslation, but, nevertheless, there is an element of hypocrisy in the Hebrew word '*chaneph*.'

Those Hebrew words passed into the Authorized Version from the Latin, which followed the Greek versions. In *The Revised Version* it is rendered 'godless,' or 'profane.' Nevertheless, it does relate to the concept of hypocrite. This is seen clearly here in Job 8. As we read, notice the term 'spider's web' and the reference to not seeing the hypocrite.

Job 8:11-18 "Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh? Can the reeds flourish without water? While it is yet green and not cut down, it withers before any other plant. So are the paths of all who forget God; and the hope of the hypocrite shall perish, whose confidence shall be cut off, and whose trust is a spider's web. He leans on his house, but it does not stand. He holds it fast, but it does not endure. He grows green in the sun, and his branches spread out in his garden. His roots wrap around the rock heap, and look for a place in the stones. If he is destroyed from his place, then it will deny him, saying, 'I have not seen you.'"

In verse 13, the word translated 'hypocrite' in the NKJV and KJV means something like our word "hypocrite" but not exactly. It seems that the hypocrite comes to deceive himself as well as others. In the Old Testament, this word also means "profane" and "godless."

In verse 14, the 'spider's web' is unreliable and provides no support. Also, there is the sense in the familiar saying, "Oh, what a tangled web we weave when we practice to deceive." You can see there where the aspect of a hypocrite comes into play. Then in verse 18, the statement, 'I have not seen you.' infers the idea that one is unable to see the real character behind the face of a hypocrite.

Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies states under the heading "Hypocrite" the Hebrew words from which hypocrite is rendered literally means "profane man." *Wilson's* goes on to say that most forms of the word in the original Hebrew have this meaning,

. . . one defiled in mind and conscience, yet concealing it, and pretending to be outwardly what he is not inwardly; to have zeal and affection towards God, when his heart is far from him; or dividing his heart between God and the world; opposed to the innocent, who has a good conscience. . .

You see there that in that Old Testament word there is that element of hypocrisy.

A profane man is one who violates sacred things, for example, the Sabbath, the name of God, divine laws, and God's covenant. He is a man who stains what is beautiful and glorious. There is a clear indication in the Old Testament that hypocrisy equates with profanity of any kind. Other concepts related to profane are "common" and "unholy".

We see there some background definitions of the word hypocrite, that it does also include "godless."

The word hypocrite is based on the Greek theatrical words that mean "actor" or "to play a part." The essential identity of hypocrites, therefore, is that they pretend to be something they are not. Psalm 26:4 calls them "false men" and "dissemblers" (RSV), but in the Gospels the implications are more specific: hypocrites pretend to be paragons of religious virtue while lacking spiritual virtue in their inner being.

Mark 7:6 records Jesus' own words, "He answered and said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "his people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me."'"

According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*:

'Hypocrite' primarily denotes one who answers; then, a stage-actor; 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.

This is where our word hypocrite comes from today—that picture of a Greek or Roman actor.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus vigorously exposed and denounced the hypocrisy of many who opposed Him, especially the scribes and Pharisees. They paraded their charitable deeds, praying, and fasting as a theatrical display to win the praise of men. They sought to give the appearance of being godly, but they were actually blind to the truth of God.

A composite portrait is easy to assemble from Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees. They were ostentatious when they gave alms with the intent that people would praise them. When they fasted they disfigured their faces. They also tried to trap Jesus by hypocritically pretending to be perplexed about religious issues.

A final quote here according to the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*,

The hypocrisy of the Gospels is the 'appearing before men what one ought to be, but is not, before God.' At times it is a deliberately played part, at others it is a deception of which the actor himself is unconscious. . . . Thus, according to Christ, all who play the part of religion, whether consciously or unconsciously, without being religious, are hypocrites; and so fall under His sternest denunciation.

You might say that is a definition of hypocrisy in its strictest sense.

A study of the actual charges against the Pharisees shows that not all cases can be interpreted as hypocrisy. We find blindness to their fault, an over-valuation of human tradition, sheer ignorance of God's demands, and love of display. This love of display was motivated by pride and many times resulted in hypocrisy.

Matthew 6:1-4 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."

What that is talking about is obvious. Basically what this is saying, in our modern vernacular, is do not toot your own horn.

The command in Matthew 7:1 to "Judge not" is often misunderstood, especially by the unconverted. It refers to rash, censorious, and unjust judgment. Christ does not condemn judging as a magistrate, because when it is according to justice it is lawful and necessary. Nor does He condemn our "forming an opinion" of the conduct of others, for it is impossible "not" to form an opinion of conduct that we know to be evil. But, the opinion must, of course, be based on God's truth.

What He refers to is a habit of forming a judgment hastily, harshly, and without an allowance for less serious circumstances, and a habit of expressing an opinion harshly and unnecessarily when formed. It refers to private judgment rather than "judicial." It maybe that Jesus had the customs of the scribes and Pharisees in mind, knowing what He said throughout Matthew 23.

Matthew 7:1-5 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 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."

Only God, the sole perfect discerner of inward realities, could pass the condemnation that they were hypocrites. God's words to Samuel in I Samuel 16:7 explains why, "For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

One method of detecting the hypocrite is by his unmerciful judgment of others, whether verbal or actually passing open violent judgment, because by such expressions he not only seeks to confirm his own standing, he also falls into self-deceit. The more he finds to blame in others, the more confident he grows in his own worth, and the more easily he appeases his conscience with regard to the inconsistency of his moral state with his actions and the incongruity of his secret with his open ways.

The Pharisees are the prototypical hypocrites of the Bible. We should understand that the Pharisees were model citizens of Israel, accepted leaders simply by virtue of their zeal for the law. But, it was PRIDE that knocked them down and it was PRIDE that drove them to their hypocritical state.

The *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia* says,

Pride is inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem, attended with insolence and rude treatment of others. . . . It manifests itself by praising ourselves, adoring our persons, attempting to appear before others in a superior light to what we are; contempt and slander of others; envy at the excellences others possess; anxiety to gain applause; distress and rage when slighted; impatience of contradiction, and opposition to God himself.

This is the foundation of hypocrisy, which is called pride. Pride can be considered as the parent of hypocrisy, discontent, ingratitude, covetousness, poverty, presumption, passion, extravagance, bigotry, war, and persecution. The list goes on and one of which pride is the foundation to. In fact, almost all evil has pride connected with it in at least a nearby or remote sense.

Before we begin to look at the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, in more detail, it will be helpful to see briefly what the scribes and Pharisees actually represented and how they came to be.

The Jews had a deep and lasting sense of the continuity of their religion; and we can see best what the Scribes and Pharisees stood for by seeing where they came into the scheme of Jewish religion. The Jews had a saying,

Moses received the Law and delivered it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue.

All Jewish religion is based first on the Ten Commandments and then on the Pentateuch, the law.

The history of the Jews was designed to make them a people of the law. As every nation has, they had their dream of greatness. Pride drove them to this goal. But, by the hand of God, the experiences of history had made that dream take a special direction for the Jews.

They had been conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. As a result, Jerusalem had been left desolate.

It was clear that they could not be pre-eminent in political power. But although political power was an obvious impossibility, they none the less possessed the law, and to them the law was the very word of God, the greatest and most precious possession in the world.

In the 5th century BC, under Ezra and Nehemiah the people were allowed to come back to Jerusalem, and to rebuild their shattered city, and to take up their national life again. When that happened, Ezra the Scribe, took the book of the law, and read it to them. It was at this point when there was a national dedication of the people to the keeping of the law. This is recorded in Nehemiah 8.

From that time the study of the law became the greatest of all professions; and that study of the law was committed to the men of the great synagogue, that we know of as the scribes.

As they began to use their own human reasoning, the great principles of the law were broken up into thousands upon thousands of little rules and regulations. The law said that a man must not work on the Sabbath day, so the scribes labored diligently to define work.

They laid down how many paces a man might walk on the Sabbath, how heavy a burden he might carry, the many things he might and might not do on the Sabbath. By the time this scribal interpretation of the law was finished, it took more than fifty volumes to hold the mass of regulations that resulted.

The return of the people to Jerusalem and the first dedication of the law took place about 455 BC. But it is not until long after that that the Pharisees emerged. About 175 BC Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria made a deliberate attempt to stamp out the Jewish religion and to introduce Greek religion and Greek customs and practices.

It was then that the Pharisees arose as a separate sect. The name means "The Separated Ones;" and they were the men who dedicated their whole life to the careful and meticulous observance of every rule and regulation that the scribes had worked out.

In face of the threat directed against the Jews and their religion, they determined to spend their whole lives in one long observance of Judaism in its most elaborate and ceremonial and legal form. They were dedicated men who accepted the ever-increasing number of religious rules and regulations extracted from the law.

There were never very many of them; at most there were not more than 6,000 Pharisees. The plain fact was that, if a man was going to accept and carry out every little regulation of the Law, he would have time for nothing else; he had to withdraw himself, and to separate himself, from ordinary life in order to keep the law of the Jews.

The Pharisees then, were two things. First, they were dedicated legalists; religion to them was the observance of every detail of the law. But second, they were men in desperate earnest about their religion, for no one would have accepted the impossibly demanding task of living a life like that unless he had been in the most deadly earnest and a most deeply dedicated man.

They developed at one and the same time all the faults of legalism and all the virtues of complete self-dedication. A Pharisee might either be a desiccated or arrogant legalist, or a man of burning devotion to whom he felt God was.

To say this is not to pass a judgment on the Pharisees, for the Jews themselves passed that very verdict. The Talmud distinguishes 7 different kinds of Pharisees.

You will find this list of 7 both interesting and eye-opening. It illustrates 6 attitudes out of 7 that every Christian should work to avoid.

The first of the seven was the "Shoulder Pharisee." He was meticulous in his observance of the Law; but he wore high good deeds upon his shoulder. He was out for a reputation for purity and goodness. True, he obeyed the law, but he did so in order to be seen of men. Obviously, he was a hypocrite.

The second type was the "Wait-a-little Pharisee." He was the Pharisee who could always produce an entirely valid excuse for putting off a good deed. He professed the creed of the strictest Pharisees but he could always find an excuse for allowing practice to lag behind. He spoke, but he did not do. He was another type of hypocrite.

The third type was the "Bruised or Bleeding Pharisee." The Talmud speaks of the plague of self-afflicting Pharisees. These Pharisees received their name for this reason. Women had a very low status in Palestine. No really strict orthodox teacher would be seen talking to a woman in public, even if that woman was his own wife or sister. These Pharisees went even further; they would not even allow themselves to look at a woman on the street. In order to avoid doing so they would shut their eyes, and so bump into walls and buildings and obstructions. (It is pretty hilarious, is it not? These were *very* dedicated men.) They thus bruised and wounded themselves, and their wounds and bruises gained them a special reputation for exceeding piety—another hypocrite.

This brings to mind one instructor that I had at Ambassador College who had trained to be a rabbi. He would always look up into the air. You felt as if he was looking at the ceiling whenever he spoke to you. Sue and I used to purposely sit in the balcony of the Auditorium so that he would look at us during his sermon, because even during his sermon he would be looking up in the air. He was a very genuine man and a man that I respected. I do not mean to put him down at all. It just shows that after years and years in God's church, he had a hard time breaking the habit that is formed by this type of thing.

The fourth type of Pharisee was the Pharisee who was variously described as the "Pestle and Mortar Pharisee," or "Hump-backed Pharisee," or the

"Tumbling Pharisee." (Those are all the same one.) Such men walked in such ostentatious humility that they were bent like a pestle in a mortar or like a hunch-back. They were so humble that they would not even lift their feet from the ground and so tripped over every obstruction they met. Their humility was a self-advertising ostentation. This was another hypocritical type of Pharisee. It was a wonder that they lived very long because it seems like they got injured a lot.

The fifth was the "Ever-reckoning" or "Compounding Pharisee." This kind of Pharisee was forever reckoning up his good deeds; he was for ever striking a balance sheet between himself and God, and he believed that every good deed he did put God a little further in his debt. To him religion was always to be reckoned in terms of a profit and loss account. That was compared to God. (That one especially scares me.)

Keep in mind, this is what the Jews wrote in the Talmud about their own Pharisees.

The sixth was the "Timid" or "Fearing Pharisee." He was always in dread of divine punishment. He was, therefore, always cleansing the outside of the cup and the platter, so that he might seem to be good. He saw religion in terms of judgment and life in terms of a terror-stricken evasion of this judgment. He was a hypocrite as well.

The seventh type was a little bit different in his thinking than the other six. Finally, the seventh one was the "God-fearing Pharisee;" he was the Pharisee who really and truly loved God and who found his delight in obedience to the law of God, however difficult that it might be. But, he was self-deceived and worshipped a god he had formed in his own mind through human reasoning.

That was the Jew's own classification of the Pharisees, except for that last comment about that last Jew being self-deceived and worshipping the god that he formed.

In the gospels the words Pharisee and hypocrite are nearly synonymous. The etymology of hypocrite suggests "a pretender." In Jewish culture the Pharisees pretend to be the authoritative opinion on righteousness and the

law. They are very convincing in many ways in their writings. They are fervently loyal to God, zealous for knowledge of Scripture, respected as the authority even by those who disagreed with them.

Jesus challenged their right to their assumed position and exposed their pretense and emerged as a higher authority. The Pharisees defended their stance aggressively, ultimately collaborating in Jesus' death. You know how the story goes.

The images of a Pharisee compose the portrait of a person having zeal without knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom, occupying the seat of Moses in Jewish culture, outstanding by all cultural measures of righteousness but threatened by the Messiah's arrival. There we see the element of pride behind hypocrisy.

Their zeal was without knowledge. As I mentioned earlier, as a religious group the lineage of the Pharisees can be traced to the post-exilic reform efforts of Nehemiah and Ezra. Their intense loyalty to God and separatists philosophy reflected the suspicion of kingdoms that lingered after the Jews' exile. In their zealous efforts to observe the law and establish boundaries demarcating true Israelite identity, they embraced oral as well as written law, thus differing from the Sadducees on the resurrection of the body, among other things.

Here in Acts 23:6-10 we will see this difference.

Acts 23:6-10 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to

pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

They fervently sought knowledge of God. Both Nicodemus, who questioned Christ in the night, and Gamaliel, who suspended judgment on the earthly church, were Pharisees. There were Pharisees who listened to and agreed with Christ, but most of the Pharisees seemed to be against Him.

Jesus infuriated the Pharisees by solving their hardest riddles, surpassing their highest standards, and exceeding their discernment of law. But they were prompted to action when He asserted His right to their position as religious authority. Along with miraculously healing the impure, Jesus claimed a special relationship to God. He also owns the messianic role with direct appeals to their treasured law.

John 10:33-39 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" '? "If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

Notice there that Jesus says that even if you do not believe who I am, believe the truth that comes out of My mouth. This is the very thing that is trying to be gotten rid of out of our society today. As I mentioned earlier, if a hypocrite (or someone who is labeled a hypocrite) speaks truth, then the truth is just shrugged off. And it gives society an excuse to commit adultery, murder, and where does it end.

The Pharisees used their political and religious clout for revenge. With their priestly roles and political connections, they encouraged Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

The proverbial blindness of the Pharisees is ironically reversed when one Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, gained sight by being blinded on the Damascus Road. His vicious persecution of Christians demonstrated the false conviction of pride that motivated the Pharisees. After being blinded by the might of Jesus, whom he was persecuting, his narrow-minded view of the law was corrected and he saw clearly.

And we find a few other Pharisees trusting Christ as well in Acts 15:5 and in Acts 21:20.

Paul's tone of sorrow toward those opposed to the gospel, echoes Jesus' own sincere request regarding his blinded condemners. If a person had this attitude, he could not possibly be a hypocrite.

Luke 23:34 records the words of Jesus as saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

In the gospels the Pharisees commanded tremendous respect. This agrees with their historical refusal to be loyal to Rome; they were politically influenced because they were popular leaders of the people. Though subject to intra-Jewish criticism in the Qumran and other rabbinic literature, they were credited with the role of judge in Hebrew culture, sitting in "the seat of Moses".

But the Pharisees were foremost interested in the restoration of Israel. Their concern for keeping of the law, for sanctity of the temple, for the purity of Israel and for the full Israelite claim on the land of Israel were ignited by prophetic promise with political implications. This is why we find them to be the foremost inquisitors of Jesus. They rightly perceived that they shared common interests with Jesus, the rabbi from Galilee. This is partly why they sent a delegation to examine John the Baptist, and later, they constantly questioned Jesus.

But the gospels record little casual conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. Stories of conflict with Pharisees were more common. Jesus

accused them of such abuses as abusing their power (i.e., by devouring widows' houses, taking the best synagogue seats, and expecting dutiful marketplace greetings, and demanding the title, Rabbi.)

We are going to spend a little time here in Matthew 23 because of all the chapters in the Bible it is probably the one we think of when we think of either Pharisee or hypocrite.

Jesus criticized the burdens of the law that the Pharisees loaded on the people. To make matters worse they offered no assistance. The Pharisees made religion a burden in every way.

Matthew 23:1-4 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Jesus was not commending the scribes and Pharisees with all their rules and regulations. He was saying, "In so far as these scribes and Pharisees have taught you the great principles of the Law that Moses received from God, you must obey them." The problem with the Pharisees was that they were not properly applying the Spirit of the law. Therefore, they were making the law a burden to the people.

The whole of the Ten Commandments are based on two great principles. They are based on reverence, reverence for God, for God's name, for God's way of life, and love of God. And, they are based on respect, respect for a man's life, for his possessions, for his personality, and for oneself, which also equates to love.

These principles are eternal; and, in so far as the scribes and Pharisees taught reverence for God and respect for men, their teaching was eternally binding and eternally valid.

But their whole outlook on religion had one fundamental effect. It made it a thing of thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations; and therefore it made it an intolerable burden. To make things worse, the Pharisees would not allow the slightest relaxation of the rules. Their whole self-confessed purpose was to 'build a fence around the law.' They would not relax or remove one regulation. They would require the people to keep them all while they themselves found ways to get out of them.

By all this, they prevented people from entering the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees shut the door to the kingdom of heaven with their hypocrisy and this made them missionaries of evil.

Matthew 23:13-15 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

The Pharisees taught people false religious beliefs. They made religion a science of evasion. The truly converted person will never make a promise with the deliberate intention of evading it; he will never, as he makes it, provide himself with a series of escape routes, that he can use if he finds his promise hard to keep. That is where the true Christian differs from the Pharisee. The Pharisees *did* make sure they had an out if something was too hard for them to do.

We should think twice before pointing our fingers at the Pharisees for their art of evasion. This is a very common area of human weakness. Some of us may have sought to evade some duty, such as tithing, on a technicality, or we may call in the strict letter of the law to avoid doing what the spirit of the law clearly means we ought to do.

Matthew 23:16-22 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it."

For Jesus the binding principle was two-fold here in Matthew. God hears every word we speak and God sees every intention of our hearts. In view of that, the art of evasion is one to which we should be unfamiliar. The technique of evasion may suit the perverted hypocritical practices of the world, but never our own open honesty as a true Christian. Whatever we promise we are going to do, as a Christian we should do it. But the promises that the Pharisees made is that they always had an out just in case they couldn't.

The Pharisees had a lost sense of proportion. They tithed their herb garden produce, but neglected "the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith." In their eyes the importance of a tithe of spice outweighed the importance of justice, it outweighed mercy, and it outweighed faith.

Matthew 23:23-24 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

As ideal antagonists the Pharisees shared the same physical source of knowledge about God as the teacher Jesus, but they were blinded by pride to

the complete perspective of the Law of God. Their narrow-minded vision of the law led eventually to a harsh judgment by Jesus which we saw here in verses 23-24, in fact the whole chapter of Matthew 23.

Though they were considered expert interpreters of the fine distinctions of the law, Jesus condemned them as false teachers of the law for hypocritically expanding its intention. While they took offense to His Sabbath healing of a man with a withered hand, He referred to the written law and scorned interpretations based on human reasoning. Jesus claimed their traditions made void the word of God by focusing on minute details (such as tithing of spice), and missing the greater purpose.

In Jesus' caricature of them, they cleaned the outside of a drinking cup but ignored the filth inside it—just as they did their own personal lives and their own spiritual condition.

Matthew 23:25-26 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

The Pharisees had been so occupied with their external religion that they ignored their own internal hypocritical condition. Within themselves they remained full of greed and self-indulgence. They totally missed the truth that cleaning the inside is basic to and required for the cleanliness of the outside. In simple terms, hypocrisy is a spiritually filthy inside with the appearance of a clean outside.

To emphasize their insufficient efforts at purity, Jesus called the Pharisees, "whitewashed tombs, that on the outside looked beautiful, but on the inside: painted an entirely different picture. Physically, they were disgustingly disguising their spiritual decay.

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful

outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The Greek word for hypocrisy here is hupokrites. It literally means "an actor." It is usually translated into the English word 'hypocrite' as we see here in verse 28. In some of Christ's uses of the word, it is equivalent to the concept of bad, wicked, and godless, as we see here, in verse 27 and 28. But, in general, the meaning is: acting a part, false, deceptive, and deceived. He appears formally and outwardly religious and good, but inwardly is insincere and unrighteous.

Intent on separation from all defilement, the Pharisees applied to their fellowship the laws prescribed for priests and sacrifices. No wonder they were offended when Jesus fellowshipped with tax collectors and sinners. Their boast in observance of the law and their contempt for sinners is clearly expressed in Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee esteemed his own purity in his prayer.

Luke 18:9-11 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

It is interesting that his prayer was not going any higher than the ceiling—that he was praying with himself. It gives you the feeling that he was only talking to himself, which he was.

Luke 18:12-14 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

But Jesus explained that the tax collector who begged for mercy, rather than the Pharisee, was justified in prayer. I think sometimes we slip into this kind of attitude. We make comments to our self personally or even openly that, "Oh, I'm more righteous than that person." Or, "I'm just so much closer to God than that person." Any time we make that type of comment, even in our own mind, we are guilty of pride. Not only that but hypocrisy and self-righteousness. So we have to be very careful to not even have those thoughts.

There is a certain state of hypocrisy that is far worse than absolute subjection to sin, inasmuch as in the absolute subjection to sin there may exist at least the earnest desire in the individual to rid himself of his faults, although he doesn't possess the power to do so.

The hypocrite, on the other hand, is quite contented with himself, and has no desire whatever to repent of the sin that is so deeply lodged in his mind. He merely endeavors to hide it from God and men, in order to be able to gratify his sinful inclinations more securely under the cover of an assumed purity. This is the hypocritical attitude that defines the Laodicean.

In certain respects the frivolous sinner is far better than the hypocrite, inasmuch as the open sinner has at least no desire to deceive any one about his condition. The frivolous sinner does not present himself to the world otherwise than he really is. This open truthfulness in the open sinner, however, is counterbalanced by the fact that the hypocrite recognizes at least a divine law and judgment. He is still alive to the consciousness of the incongruity of his state of mind and heart with this divine law.

Yet hypocrisy—as a permanent untruthfulness, as a systematic deceit, as a life in dissimulation—will gradually annihilate all sense of its own condition. This means that, with regard to hypocrisy, publicans and harlots may have an easier time repenting of their sins than the Pharisees.

Yet Christ tells us that unless our righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees we will not be in the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:17-20 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle

will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

We see there this exact principle where we do not follow what the Pharisees were doing. We follow what they taught that aligns with God's truth—because God's truth is God's truth no matter whom it comes from.

Unless we produce the fruit of righteousness, we will not see the Kingdom of God. Unless we are more holy than they were, we cannot receive salvation. The righteousness of true Christians is seated in the heart, and is therefore genuine. The scribes and Pharisees' righteousness consisted in outward observances of the ceremonial and traditional law. They offered sacrifices, fasted and prayed often, were meticulous about tithes and the ceremonies of religion, but neglected justice, truth, purity, and holiness of heart. The righteousness that Jesus requires for His Kingdom is: obedience, purity, chastity, honesty, temperance, the fear of God, and the love of others.

We see here in mainstream Christianity (Catholics, Protestants, and so on) that they use a similar reasoning to get rid of keeping certain aspects of the law: the Ten Commandments or tithing and such things. In that, they look at these things as legalistic and hypocritically promoted by the Pharisees. So they throw that out thinking they are justifying in their own minds a reason why not to keep them.

The primary sin that is committed in hypocrisy is bearing false witness—*lying* !

In 1921, Andre Gide, in "The Counterfeiters," worded it this way, "The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity." By that, he means convincingly.

A lie is an intentional violation of truth. In Scripture we find the word "lie" used to designate all the ways that human beings deny or alter truth in word

or deed. It is also considered evil in general. Generally speaking, the good in our word or deed is designated as the truth—evil as its opposite, or a lie.

Consequently, Satan (being contrary to God) is the father of lies, and liars or impious persons as children of Satan. The Scriptures obviously and emphatically condemn all lies—white or black. Notice here what Jesus told the Pharisees in John 8.

John 8:42-47 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

This principle certainly holds true for what we talked about having to do with our society and what is happening with the news media calling people hypocrites, thinking that destroys any truth coming out of their mouths. The truth is the truth. It cannot be destroyed.

Strict truthfulness requires that we should never alter the truth, either in words or actions, so as to deceive others, whether for pleasure, or to benefit others or ourselves, or even for the best cause. We quite often hear this justification as being a 'white lie.'

In the 19th century, Leo Tolstoy, wrote in *Anna Karenina*, a very perceptive comment:

Hypocrisy is anything whatever that may deceive the cleverest and most penetrating man, but the least wide-awake of children recognize it, though it may be disguised.

We commonly notice that our children can see through a lot of what adults cannot in their true motives of people. That is because their minds have not been as clouded and perverted as they have by the time we reach adulthood.

The apostle Paul encountered hypocrisy among some Jewish Christians, who refused to eat with the Gentile converts. Paul pointed out that "sincere (literally in the Greek, un-hypocritical) love" is one of the marks of a true Christian. In Romans 12, Paul explains how we can have un-hypocritical love. He offered a series of rules and principles with which we can govern our relationships with each other.

Romans 12:9-16 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

We see there what the solution to avoiding hypocrisy is—humility, love, and sincerity.

Love must be completely sincere. There can be no hypocrisy, no play-acting, no ulterior motive. There is a false love that gives affection while at the same time keeping one eye on what can be gained for the self. It is a selfish love with the goal to get far more than it will give.

True Christian love is not profane but it's cleansed of self; it is pure and sincere, has outgoing concern for others—and it is from the heart—that is, it is genuine in every way.

In conclusion, hypocrisy is the name for the successful or unsuccessful endeavor of a person to impart to others—by the expression of his features or gestures, by his outward actions and by his whole appearance—a favorable

opinion of his: principles, good intentions, love, unselfishness, truthfulness, and conscientiousness. While in reality these qualities are lacking in him.

It is a unique kind of untruthfulness, which has its definite aims and means. It is precisely because these aims refer to the moral qualifications of the hypocrite, because he speaks and acts as if he is an honest man, that hypocrisy has found room and opportunity in social life, in commerce and industry, in politics, and above all, in the field of religion.

Of all the things we read about hypocrisy in the news media and all of the accusations that are thrown at other people, I think that it is most common that hypocrisy is used toward Christians or other religious people.

Hypocrisy is inconsistent with reality, because it places man before the face of the almighty God—the God who sees the heart and who penetrates human thought even from its very beginning; who perceives clearly its development and completion. So that the hypocrite, even if he would succeed in deceiving other human beings, will have no benefit from his hypocritical actions in the end.

Because true religion does not consist entirely in the performance of outward actions, but makes the worth of the person dependent on the righteous state of his heart and mind, it creates the greater desire in him to acquire the reputation of really having these qualities.

There is a great danger when we try to do what God wants and we are part of a church and we try to look and appear that we are perfect when we are not. We slip into the sin of hypocrisy.

Even though these qualities are of a spiritual nature, they are primarily manifested by outward actions. Since the outward actions are of a physical nature, they catch the eye of the world, and can be manifested without having a genuine mental and moral state—that is, they can be faked.

But, as Christians we are to uphold the standard of righteousness God has set for us.

The apostle James says the true wisdom is not a pose and does not deal in deception. It is honest, and it never pretends to be what it is not; and never acts a part to gain its own ends.

James 3:17-18 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.