

HYPOCRITES

SERMON, Matthew 23:29-36

Do you believe the church is full of hypocrites?

Jesus said this. (Please consider his anger and his concern.) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?

Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and the wise; some of them you will kill and crucify and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth. Truly I say to you, these things shall come upon this generation.”

Hypocrisy in the church is a sensitive topic. You maybe have made this statement at times. Certainly, you’ve heard others make it. “The church is full of hypocrites.”

In the Bible, particularly in today’s Scripture lesson, Jesus frequently criticizes hypocrites, especially among the religious leaders of his time. He uses the term "hypocrite" to describe those who put on a facade of piety while lacking genuine faith and love, and he especially calls those who judge others while ignoring their own flaws hypocrites. Jesus's condemnation of hypocrisy highlights the importance

of sincerity and genuine faith over outward appearances.

In the church, we must beware of hypocrisy, as it can turn God's favor into an excuse for favoritism.

Hypocrisy found its way into the hearts of those in religious leadership of the Jewish faith during the time of Jesus and in the early church, turning what should have been humble gratitude for God's grace into a weapon of pride and favoritism.

Does Jesus forgive hypocrites? Of course, where there is repentance, there is forgiveness. Jesus forgives the sin and guilt of religious hypocrisy.

He will forgive. But please understand Jesus detests going through the motions of “church” instead of daily coming to God in utter dependence. You might feel like a hypocrite today; don't worry, it's you and me at the head of the class on this. Praise God who offers us forgiveness and so much more in Jesus Christ.

Steven Spielberg said, “I make fantasy films, adventure films. But I have never had a cause until I made Schindler’s List, about the persecution and salvation of perhaps 1,000-2,000 Jews by one ingenious man.”

When his Schindler's List movie came out, Spielberg said, "I never really realized what it means to be a Jew. Now I have a cause. I am raising \$60 million to make videotapes of 50,000 Holocaust survivors, so they can tell their stories and their experiences will never be a total loss." This is my cause, he said.

Do you have a cause? Does our church have a cause?

What is our cause? Can our cause be to include the hypocrites in our midst? To make pillar beloved church members of hypocrites?

Jesus says the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. To Jesus, his entire society was permeated with hypocrisy because of faulty spiritual leadership.

Imagine the scene as He confronts the scribes and the Pharisees. They have come to confront him and prove him a false teacher. Jesus looks at these men and he speaks with complete truth, knowing their hearts.

You hypocrites!" Jesus says. "You have become a hindrance to those who want to enter into the kingdom of God. You stop them. You will even go to the sea or the land for one convert, not to Judaism, but to you and your teaching."

“I want to tell you one thing,” He says to them. “Those you win with your attitude and your teaching, are twice children of hell and worse, rather than better, because of you.”

He tells them, “You know the commandments, but let me tell you that I know you neglect the mightier things, the weightier things. You neglect justice. You neglect mercy. You neglect faithfulness.”

“You hypocrites!” Jesus says to the spiritual leaders of his day. “You have made our Jewish faith a matter of following external rituals. You have no concern about internal things. About righteousness. About justice. On the inside, you are unclean and dead. You yourself bear the guilt of this time. Your condemnation is at hand.”

Is the church full of hypocrites? Is our church full of hypocrites? Yes. Maybe not full, but yes. Always has been. A hypocrite is someone who is two-faced, someone who is pretending, play acting.

But those who say, “I never go to church because it is full of hypocrites,” well, they go to an office full of hypocrites, they go the club full of hypocrites, they go their civic

organizations full of hypocrites, to their sports leagues full of hypocrites, they even go home, which is full of hypocrites.

When someone lays that line on me about not going to church because churches are full of hypocrites, my response is, “There’s always room for one more.” I think it is a lame excuse for not attending church. But is everyone in the Christian Church a hypocrite? Of course not.

But, let me ask, is there a better place for a hypocrite than church? I can’t think of one. If you see hypocrisy in yourself, review. I have to do this for myself personally. Self-review.

If I’m being overly hypocritical, is it because I don’t know more about Christ? Is it because I am just an infant when it comes to spiritual things? Is it because of my own insecurities? Is it because I do not know better? Or is it because I do not want to know better?

Next time you hear someone ask, “Is your church full of hypocrites? please answer: “Oh, yes. Do you have a better suggestion? Where would you want them to go? They are struggling with their hypocrisies. They are seeking to become like Christ. And, oh, Christ so loves them. It is happening.”

All because of the cross. All because of God's love. All because Jesus was obedient even unto death, for you and me and especially for all those hypocrites. Glad we are not among them!

What a Christ we have. What joy He can bring into a heart that is honestly struggling to put the hypocrisies, the inconsistencies, the two-faced things aside and follow Jesus as His disciples.

Maybe we should start a Hypocrites Anonymous group? Ha! My name is Bob and I'm a hypocrite.

Hypocrites Anonymous meets here, Sunday mornings, 9am and 11:11am.