

## What Is True Hypocrisy? [Slide 1]

When asked what his best song lyrics were, John Lennon replied, the song, “All You Need is Love” in which he sings in the chorus: All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love is all you need. John Lennon sang about love, but he didn’t live it. He abandoned his son, Julian Lennon when Julian was five. This is what Julian had to say about his father. Read card. It reminds me of what the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy said, “Everyone thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.”

The church certainly comes in for its share of criticism about hypocrisy. One of the most common complaints about the church is that it is full of hypocrites. That common complaint has spurred me to do a three part sermon series on hypocrisy. Today I want to look at what hypocrisy really is. Next week I want to look at some common false charges of hypocrisy and then in the last week I want to talk about how to live a hypocrisy free life.

Jesus had a lot to say about hypocrisy. In fact most of the opposition he received in his ministry was from religious hypocrites. I want to start the sermon today by studying the word “hypocrite” to understand its most basic meaning. The English word, hypocrite is the transliteration of the Greek word hypokrites. According to the Greek lexicon a hypocrites is a pretender or a play actor. It is a person who makes an outer show or pretense of being something that they are not.

Hypocrisy is a universal problem. Who hasn’t at some time or another pretended to be better than they actually were? We all want to be honorable, respectable people in the eyes of others and sometimes we will pretend to be better than we are in order to gain the respect and admiration of others. Hypocrisy can take the most subtle of forms. For example, Donna Freitas, in her thought-provoking book, *The Happiness Effect*, argues that the real downside of social media is that it demands fake happiness. Read article.

Hypocrisy becomes most obnoxious when the gap between what we pretend to be and what we actually are is very large. The greater the gap, the more obnoxious the hypocrisy. The hypocrisy becomes irritating when the person proclaims and preaches that other people should be and act a certain way when they don’t act that way.

Religious people are especially susceptible to hypocrisy. Why is that? It is because most religions extol and promote the value that a person should be good and righteous and godly. That is typically one of the central messages of a religious organization unlike secular organizations which may not have that as their central message. Yet we are all flawed people, still wrestling with sin habits and falling short of the ideals our faith proclaims. Given the gap between our reality and our professed ideals we can either live lives of authenticity and confess our sins and failures and seek the help of our fellow Christians or we can pretend to be better than we are and hope no one finds out. However, those in the world often do find out because they see us in unguarded moments and if we persist in hiding our failures, they will charge us with hypocrisy.

We often are hypocrites because we are afraid to confess our sins, fearing that our own brothers and sisters will reject us because they seem not to struggle like us and some of them don’t, but others do, but they are hiding also.

So, let’s take a trip through the New Testament this morning to see how hypocrisy develops and then I want to close by explaining why you should go to church even if hypocrites attend it.

You will want to open your sermon outline because I have printed out most of the verses we will cover today so you don't have to keep flipping through your Bible.

[Slide 2] Hypocrites practice their righteousness publically in order to be seen by others. Look at Matthew 6:1. Read. Jesus provides three examples in Matthew chapter six of those who practiced their righteousness in order to be seen by others. He mentioned giving, praying and fasting. Notice that it was not the public nature of the act that made it hypocrisy. It was the motive behind the act that made it hypocrisy. These people were practicing these religious acts in order to be seen by people. Their primary audience was not God, it was people. They wanted to impress other people with how righteous they were. That is what made their actions hypocritical.

Hypocrisy always has a public element to it. Hypocrites want others to observe them because that is the only way they think they can convince others of how righteous or how good they are. Initially you are not going to be able to tell that they are hypocrites. It is only when you discover that their public behavior does not match their private behavior that you can begin to detect their hypocrisy. Only when you discover that those who pray eloquently in public rarely pray in private or those who fast publicly are full of pride and arrogance do you realize that you are dealing with a hypocrite.

[Slide 3] Hypocrites judge others for sins the hypocrite has not addressed in themselves. In Matthew 7:5 Jesus said, "Read." This is a particularly irritating form of hypocrisy when someone challenges you about a sin in your life and you know they have done nothing to rid themselves of the same sin. What is even more irritating is when someone inaccurately accuses you of a sin that actually characterizes them. Psychologists call this projection. They project on you the sin that besets them. They accuse you of being harsh and mean-spirited when they are the one who is harsh and mean-spirited. They accuse you of deceiving, when they are the deceiver. This is a form of hypocrisy.

Julie's grandmother in her later years would accuse her extended family of all being liars and thieves. However, if you went into her house or later her room you would find all sorts of objects that belonged to other people that she had pocketed when no one was looking.

[Slide 4] Hypocrites profess to obey God but they subtly replace God's commands with the doctrines of men. Let's read Matthew 15:3-9. Read. The Pharisees had worked out this arrangement that if they declared part of their wealth as belonging to God, then they did not have to spend that money to support their aging parents in contradiction to the Commandment to Honor Your Father and Your Mother. They had elevated man's tradition above the Word of God.

Much of the white American church sinned this way for many years by barring people of color from worshipping with them and then later opposing interracial marriage as if that is what God meant by not being unequally yoked rather than it referring to a believer marrying a non-believer. Those systematic hypocrisies deeply compromised the church's witness in our nation. They are hypocrisy because people were pretending to obey God when they actually were doing the exact opposite.

[Slide 5] Jesus identifies a similar form of hypocrisy in verse 8: honoring God with your lips when your heart is far from him. I shudder to think how often we are singing blatant hypocrisy. When we sing, "I surrender all, do we?" When we sing, "You are all I want, you are all I need," do we really mean that? I wonder if God sometimes listens to us, shakes his head, and says, "Not true." How many of you this very morning pretended when you sang, where your heart did

not match what came out of your mouth? Well, that is way too convicting. Let's move on. I thank the Lord that he even loves hypocrites.

[Slide 6] Hypocrites pretend to honor someone they are out to get. Let's read Matthew 22:15-18. Read. They laid it on thick in verse 16. "We know you are truthful and teach the way of God in truth and defer to no one and are not partial." They said all this to try to get Jesus to relax his guard. The person who pretends to be your best friend, then stabs you in the back is a hypocrite.

A very similar type of hypocrisy is when someone acts like they want to be your friend but they are really just interested in selling you something. One of our people had a person from her past call and say they wanted to get together to catch up. Only when they got together for lunch the person tried to sell her something. Christianity Today published an article entitled The Divine Rise of Multi-level Marketing which details the large inroads multi-level marketing has made within the church. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with being an entrepreneur and selling stuff, it is easy to begin to see your fellow Christians merely as customers rather than as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[Slide 7] Hypocrites scrupulously observe small things and then ignore weightier matters. In Matthew 23:23-24 Jesus said, "Read." The Pharisees would tithe every tenth leaf of mint, dill or cumin while robbing widows of their homes and plotting to kill Jesus.

[Slide 8] Hypocrites present an outward righteousness that covers an inward wickedness. Look at Matthew 23:25-31 on your outline. Read. The worst kind of hypocrisy is when someone pretends to be righteous and they are actually evil. It turns out that the past CEO of the Humane Society was anything but humane toward his subordinates. Read article. Not only the CEO but apparently much of the Senior Management of the Humane Society was not so humane.

[Slide 9] Hypocrites don't apply the same grace to others that they apply to themselves. Look at Luke 13:14-1. Read. This phenomenon reminds me about the joke about the Kansas preacher. Tell joke on card. So, when you don't extend the same grace to others that you want them to extend to you, that is hypocrisy.

[Slide 10] Hypocrisy happens when you behave contrary to what you believe. Even apostles like Peter and Barnabas were guilty of hypocrisy. Look at Galatians 2:11-14 where Paul confronts Peter with his hypocrisy. Read. Peter and Barnabas denied the truth of the Gospel that people are saved by faith in Christ alone and not by works of the Law. Since the Gentiles had not been circumcised according to the law, when the Circumcision Party arrived, Peter stopped fellowshiping with the Gentiles as if they were not brothers and sisters in Christ. His behavior contradicted the truth of the Gospel and he did it out of fear. He didn't want to get into conflict with the Jewish Circumcision Party.

We often do act hypocritically out of fear that we will be criticized or condemned by someone. We conform to the expectations of others even when it violates our own personal convictions. You need to fear God more than the Circumcision parties of your life.

[Slide 11] Peter apparently did learn his lesson from Paul's confrontation because he writes later in 1 Peter 2:1-2. [Slide 12] Nevertheless, Paul warns in one of his last letters in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that the end times will be characterized by increased levels of hypocrisy. Read.

From our survey we can see that hypocrisy occurs when I act or speak contrary to what I really believe or who I really am. The greater the discrepancy between my private world and my outer pretense, the more obnoxious the hypocrisy. Often times we play the hypocrite out of fear that people will discover who we really are. That is a form of bondage. As painful as they may appear to be, confession and honesty are the path to true freedom.

[Slide 13] I want to close by telling you why you should go to church even if hypocrites attend. First reason is because hypocrisy is a universal problem. It doesn't just appear in church. Hypocrites can be found in all clubs, organizations, and companies. You don't want to avoid some group because of the hypocrites because then you would have to live in isolation and even that doesn't work because you can't escape yourself. Unless there is always complete integrity between who you are inside and how you present yourself to the world, you too are a hypocrite.

[Slide 14] Second, Jesus faced most of his opposition from religious hypocrites. They are the ones who had Jesus killed. Hypocrites populate Hell. You don't want to ignore or reject Jesus because of all the hypocrites in church because by so doing you are choosing to spend your eternity with all those hypocrites, not a very smart idea.

[Slide 15] Third, Jesus is not calling you to be a religious hypocrite. He is calling you to be a Christ follower. He is not asking you to place your faith in some hypocrite or become like a hypocrite. Jesus is calling you to place your faith in him and become like him. The hypocrites are a red herring. That is not the issue for you. Your issue is; how will you respond to Jesus Christ?

In the third sermon we will talk further about how to escape being a hypocrite. Next week we will talk about some common false accusations about hypocrisy. I invite you to come back to hear more. Let's pray.