

## THE WORST KIND OF HYPOCRISY

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*Hypocrisy*, in its simplest definition, is to say one thing and do or truly feel something else. It is basically an integrity issue. Sometimes we associate hypocrisy with the idea of putting up (on) a facade which is a deceptive outward appearance. We may do this deliberately and openly at times when we might wear a mask to a party or when kids go out to engage in the practice of “trick or treat.” It has become an art form and has spawned very successful businesses of the theater and the television and movie industry. When we are honest and open about “pretending” or “acting out a role,” then the hypocrisy is acceptable and even desirable as a form of entertainment or amusement.

In real life situations, hypocrisy is viewed with great disdain and many relationships have been ruined by the deception we call hypocrisy. People have asked and debated the question, “If a tree falls in the forest and no life is around to hear it, did it make a sound?” A similar question could be asked and maybe debated regarding hypocrisy: “Can hypocrisy exist apart from relationships?” The answer to this poser is simply “No” and “Yes.” We get two answers because it depends on how we define a “relationship.”

Normally, we think of relationships as interactions between two (or more) people. This has been studied and discussed for millennia. It is still being studied and discussed. What we typically define as success will, many times, hinge on how well we handle relationships. I found a quote several years ago and was so impressed by it that I wrote it on a card and posted in on the wall of my office - I still have that card today. It simply says:

Every organization is a social system, a network of interpersonal relationships. A person may do an excellent job by objective standards of measurement, but may fail miserably as a partner, subordinate, superior, or a colleague. It is common place that more people fail to be promoted for personal reasons than for technical inadequacy. \*

This truth applies in business, government, church, civic or fraternal organizations, and the family. While there is more to the practice of good relationships than honesty and integrity, nothing comes as close to hurting the interaction as does hypocrisy.

Relationships go beyond that between two or more people. There is a relationship that we have with our Creator. It is one thing to try to fool your friends and co-workers with a facade and phony persona, but why would anyone try to fool God Who sees all and knows all? Objectively, we know this is true and yet so many times, we pretend even in our relationship with God.

How can we do this? Some times we simply find a scripture verse that we think justifies our bad behavior or bad attitude. Another way is that in our prayers we spend more time confessing the faults of others than in confessing our own faults.

Are these the only possibilities in relationship? Other people and God? No, there is one other and that is our relationship with ourselves. We know that hypocrisy applies to interpersonal relationships, but do we realize that it also applies to the intra-personal relationship. Henry David Thoreau has been quoted as saying

*It takes two to speak the truth - one to speak and another to listen.*

I would guess that Thoreau would think that the negative corollary (substitute lie for truth) to this would also apply. However, unless we think that “you” and “yourself” are two different individuals, then I would conclude that it only takes ONE. We can certainly speak the truth or a lie to ourselves. We can literally deceive ourselves. William Shakespeare recognized this in his famous line from *Hamlet*:

*This, above all, To thine own self, be true.*

The worst kind of hypocrisy is to deceive ourselves. Going back to Thoreau, we listen to ourselves more than we listen to anyone else. The reason for this is simply that we talk to ourselves more than we talk to anyone else. So, the question for each of us is how

can we avoid being hypocritical even to ourselves. Unless we get that right, then we will always struggle with hypocrisy with all other relationships. Where do we start? Obviously, we start where the problem is - in the seat of our being, what the Scriptures calls the heart.

The problem of hypocrisy is basically that we are deceiving those with whom we have a relationship. That group would include ourselves. That deceit lies deeply within our heart. Jeremiah writes

<sup>9</sup>“The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? <sup>10</sup>“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 (NASB95)

Right away, we can see there is a real problem that we cannot handle by ourselves! The implied answer to the question of “Who can understand it?” is “No one, except the Lord.” As you know, most people are either ignoring the problem or if they are working on it, they are trying to do it alone or, perhaps, with the aid of a psychologist or psychiatrist. However, as Jeremiah has already told us, this approach is not going to work.

If the Lord is the only one who can really understand the heart and test the mind, then the logical next step would be to turn to the Word of God to discover what it says about the situation. In Hebrews 4:12 we see

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The deceit of hypocrisy in the relationship with ourselves has its origins in the non-alignment of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. We deceive ourselves when we rationalize what we do by convincing ourselves (and perhaps others) that we are altruistic or charitable in what we are doing when we actually have ulterior motives. The deceit is especially insidious when we have done the rationalization so well that we fail to admit or even recognize the true motive that is driving what we do.

For example, we may do something that would appear to be the ultimate in unselfishness by giving a great sum of money or a lot

of time to a worthy cause. The “thought” could be that we are just trying to make the world better or to relieve suffering and the “intent” is actually that we want to have recognition and praise of others. The only way we can separate or judge between what we think and what we intend is by the aid of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the word of God. If we avoid such examinations of ourselves, then we continue in the deception and we limit how effective we can be in the Kingdom of God.

God sees the real motives that are behind our every word and deed. Those words would include the self-talk that we have with ourselves. Those words would also include what we say when we pray - or talk with God. Since this is so important to our spiritual growth, we would do well to give the highest priority to knowing ourselves as God knows us. This challenge is formidable to say the least. However, we are encouraged to try by “examining ourselves” and our motives. The hope that we have is that there is a time coming when we shall be able to know ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

More thoughts on the ongoing conversation with ourselves: Even while we are conversing with others, we are processing information and having a running commentary with ourselves regarding what is happening. Many times in this talking and listening to our self-talk we inadvertently miss what the other person is saying. We could conclude that part of the communication problem we have with others is that we are preoccupied with another conversation (with ourselves). Most of us are not good listeners simply because we have divided attention. Can you imagine trying to carry on a conversation with a person who is talking on the telephone with another person? It would be most distracting and you would think that the conversation was a useless exercise. The problem is that most conversations are about that dysfunctional part of the time. However, we don't realize what is going on since there is not a phone involved and the person is not talking aloud (usually) with himself or herself.

\* (Author: Douglas MacGregor or Harry Levinson in Harvard Business Review)