

Hypocrites!

How many times have you heard someone say, “I don’t go to church because the church is full of hypocrites!”

Tragically, there are thousands of people who won’t darken the door of the church because they say that the church is full of hypocrites. (A brief reminder to all of us that a hypocrite is nothing more than a person who acts contrary to their stated beliefs or behaves contrary to who they are).

It may be easy for us to get defensive over this accusation. However, we have to confess that this accusation is – right. Yes, you heard that correctly. The church is indeed full of a bunch of hypocrites. Take a look around you on a Sunday at church, and you will see a bunch of hypocrites. Every single one of us is a hypocrite.

But what about people who make this accusation? Aren’t they hypocrites as well? Some may be, but most are not. Let me explain all of this.

In Romans 6:19-22, Paul says to you and me that there are only two masters in this world; either a person is a slave to sin, or they are a slave to God. Either a person is in bondage to sin – under sin’s rule and authority – or they are a bondservant to God – under God’s rule and authority. There is no middle ground. There is no autonomous neutral position for anybody. There are only two teams – sin or God. And so, here is the reason why unbelievers are typically not hypocrites. An unbeliever is a slave to sin, which means that they do whatever they feel like doing while ignoring God. In other words, being a slave to sin means that you don’t have to bother with right thinking, living, or anything for that matter. Unbelievers are not under the influence of righteousness; they neither have faith or the Holy Spirit, so they do whatever they want.

And so, it should not surprise us when unbelievers act and think like unbelievers. It is not hypocritical when a person who is enslaved to sin – sins. That is logically consistent. When ungodly people do things, they act and behave just as we would expect.

However, what about us who call ourselves Christians? Paul says, “*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God*” (Romans 6:22). We have been baptised. Through the mighty waters of baptism, Jesus is our master. Righteousness is our gift. You and I have been freed from sin and given the benefits of God’s holiness and everlasting life. But this is where the problem arises. The world looks at you and me, and what do they see? They see hypocrites. And guess what? They are right. You and I have been freed from sin and placed under the Lord God to walk in perfect newness of life; however, we don’t. You and I want to do what is right, but we can’t. We know perfectly well that we shouldn’t sin but can’t help ourselves. When we want to do good, we don’t; and when we try not to do wrong, we do it anyway. And so, the world is right. We are a bunch of hypocrites. Don’t deny it; we are. The unbelievers are right about us. Through our baptisms, we are servants of Christ, but our actions betray us – by our actions, it appears that we are servants of sin.

This is a terrible predicament. It should bother you and me. How shall we resolve this?

Some 500 years ago, Martin Luther wrote in the 95 Theses that the entire life of believers should be repentance. In other words, repentance is not a prefabricated elaborate ritual. It is not something that can be bought at one time for all time. No, instead, repentance is a life-long project for all believers. It must be personal, it must be sincere, and it must take place throughout all of our lives. In a word, repentance acknowledges our hypocrisy. It acknowledges the inconsistency. Being a Christian is not about you and me chasing some moralistic carrot on a stick on a road to flawlessness. We are not trying to do good and be good to earn brownie points from God. We are not chasing perfection. Instead, we have been chased. Goodness is given as a gift. In other words, you don’t do good works to become a Christian, but you do good works because you already are a Christian. Or, let’s phrase it this way, you do not do good works to buy yourself out of sin’s slavery, but you do good works because you have already been redeemed out of sin’s slavery. And when we don’t do good works? Well... that’s the point - we repent.

Being a Christian has never been about accumulating morality points and holding them before God to show that we are somehow worthy. No! Being a Christian is being snatched from master sin and delivered unto master Jesus. Being a Christian is a work of God – a divine rescue of you and me where we are free from master sin, master death, and master evil.

And so, because we are freed from sin and because we belong to Jesus, we walk in newness of life. We walk in holiness. We walk in righteousness because we belong to the Righteous One – Jesus. But again, we don’t always walk in righteousness. Instead, we often act as if we still belong to master sin. Like the prodigal son who left the goodness of his father's house for hellish living, like a man looking intently in a mirror and then forgetting what he was like, and like a dog returning to its own vomit, we Christians are prone to wander and leave the God that loves us. We forget who we belong to, and we run back to master sin. We act like unbelievers when we in reality, we are baptised saints placed in God’s goodness and holiness. Again, we are hypocrites.

So, we repent. Not just once but every single day - as often as we wander back to master sin. Everyday we ask, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10)

Daily repentance is at the heart of the Christian life. It is hard to recognise our sins; it is hard to grieve for our horrible sins each day, and yet at the same time, while it is difficult for us to repent, God almighty and the angels of heaven rejoice greatly when we do. Yes, there is joy when we repent because, through the gifts of repentance and faith, we are centred right where we are supposed to be – in the Lord’s grace and goodness.

So, while the world may accuse us of being hypocritical Christians, let us be so bold to confess our hypocrisies before God and a world that accuses, but then, let us be even bolder to hear and embrace Christ’s amazing work on the cross, for we know that there is more forgiveness in Christ than there is hypocrisy in us.