

Heathens, Heretics and Hypocrites... O My!



Romans 2:17-29

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God 18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; 19 and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? 22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. 24 For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” 25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. 26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The title of this message is intended to remind you of *lions and tigers and bears, O my* from the Wizard of Oz. The cowardly lion was afraid of other wild animals but he was also afraid of his own shadow. Unlike the cowardly lion, these three big sins are not shadows--they are real. They are right here before us in the text.

As we have seen in previous weeks, the second half of chapter one was about heathens; the pagans who did not have a knowledge of God but nevertheless suppressed the truth that they did have. The last two weeks we saw the heretical Jews. Though they had been given the truth through the law and the prophets, chose to believe lies. In so doing, they rejected God's infinite mercy in favor of their own good works.

Romans 1.18-26 heathens

Romans 2.1-16 heretics

Romans 2.17-29 hypocrites

And now this section gives one of the strongest arguments against hypocrisy in all of Scripture. But why all of this focus on sin? Why did Paul need to call out heathens, heretics and hypocrites? Remember that the letter to the Romans is Paul's magnum opus of theology. It is the clearest and most profound explanation of the gospel in the New Testament. But before he gets to the good news of the gospel Paul wanted to make sure everyone knew about the bad news first. Not only that, but you and I still need to hear and heed these warnings.

Interestingly, even though hypocrisy is described in rich detail, Paul never once used the actual word. But make no mistake--it is here in full color. But first, let's see how Paul sets up his readers before he lowers the boom.

Recall if you will that Paul is specifically addressing the Jews in chapter two. He begins by giving a long list of real benefits of their ancestry; all of the advantages of being a Jew.

*But if you call yourself a Jew
and rely on the law
and boast in God
and know his will
and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;
and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind,
a light to those who are in darkness,
an instructor of the foolish,
a teacher of children,
having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth*

Most all of these have to do with standing not necessarily good actions. For example, "a light to those who are in darkness" does not necessarily mean that they went into the darkness to shine the light. Rather, they have the light regardless of what they do with the light that has been given to them. In other words, they know they have the light of God's word that was given to them but that does not mean they plan to share the light with those who need it.

Take the next phrase for example--"an instructor of the foolish." Again, they may not have actually instructed the foolish or even care that they are instructed, merely that they possessed the capacity. It's like me saying, "Ya know, I played football in eighth grade and if I had wanted to, I know I could have played for the Packers. I *could* have, but I just didn't *want* to." These Jews are not only boasting, which was wrong, but they are boasting in the wrong thing--in their ownworks. They were not only boasting in their own works but it was a false boasting, a boasting without merit or proof. But more than that, they were guilty of blatant hypocrisy.

*you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?
While you preach against stealing, do you steal?
You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?
You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?
You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.*

You would be hard pressed to find a more clear description of hypocrisy in Scripture. Interestingly, Paul never even used the word hypocrite or hypocrisy yet we all know that is exactly what he is describing. If you recall, Paul never used the word homosexuality in chapter one but his clear description in that passage is unmistakable.

This morning I want to show the true damage that is done through hypocrisy. Before I begin I want to confess what I have shared many times in the past--I am a hypocrite. If hypocrisy is saying one thing and doing something else, then I am a hypocrite. This is especially true since I preach sermons. I am continually calling each of us to the high standard of the gospel and its corresponding call to live lives of holiness. So in view of my role as a preacher, I may be one of the most hypocritical people in this church.

But admitting it is half the battle, don't you think? Awareness of sin, or potential sin, is a good thing. And in this sense, we are all hypocrites since we do not live up to what we ultimately believe in Scripture. We can readily see our own hypocrisy in our parenting. We teach our children to behave in a certain way but we occasionally we violate our own standards. And admitting this to yourself and especially to your children is both necessary and powerful. It is necessary because when we sin we need to confess that sin, especially if we have sinned against our kids. And it is powerful because when we confess these things, we model a grace-filled life. By admitting our failures, we remind ourselves, our spouses and our children that we need the grace and forgiveness of Christ just as much as they do (if not more!).

So as I talk about hypocrisy this morning, please know that I am painfully aware of my own hypocrisy. If you are aware of your sin and are actively battling it by crying out to God and asking others to help, then this is not hypocrisy. This is real Christian life. I will be calling us to examine our hearts and attitudes for evidence of hypocrisy—sins that we deny and sins that we hide. But I will also be inviting us all to see more blatant hypocrisy; hypocrisy that we do not admit and may not even see due to our dark spiritual blindness; hypocrisy that is actively harming God, others and ourselves.

Incidentally, that is our outline.

1. Hypocrisy harms God.
2. Hypocrisy harms others.
3. Hypocrisy harms the hypocrite.

I want to start with a really sad example of blatant hypocrisy. Some of you will know the name Doug Phillips. Doug is the founder and president of Vision Forum. Vision Forum is a homeschooling entity which is part philosophy, resources and store. Doug and his ministry are very well known in the homeschool community. He is a regular speaker at homeschool and other Christian conferences. He has spent a good part of his life speaking about and promoting topics like discipling your family, modesty and purity, dating and courtship, principles for loving your wife and family, Biblical patriarchy. Untold numbers of people have patterned their entire lives off of what he teaches as the only Biblical way to raise a family.

Here is part of a poem written by Phillips which describes some of his viewpoints.

Your wife is your helpmeet, my friend, and not another man's,
So care for her and keep her far from Mistress Jezi's plans.
Protect, provide, and give to her your undivided life,
This is the dear one of your youth, your precious bride, your wife.

And rally to those tiny ones who trust you for their care —
A lifetime spent disciplining them's a lifetime pure and rare.
For when they put their hand in yours and know a Daddy's love,
You're showing them a picture of the Father from above.

In this poem you can see his desire to care for his wife and children, which really was at the core of his ministry. Sadly, late last month, Doug admitted to a long term physical affair with another woman. There are a few things which draw out Doug's hypocrisy to an even deeper level. As he admitted, this was not a one-time fling, as if that would not have been ban enough. It was an affair that has lasted for many years. People who have been in their ministry for years and then left or forced out speculate that it lasted from ten to twelve years. Furthermore, there is some credence to the fact that the other woman was a nanny in the Phillips household. Therefore, all of the years that he had been teaching on these important topics, he has been violating not one, but practically every one of his principles. It has been an ongoing hypocrisy of massive proportion.

1. Hypocrisy harms God.

This is what Paul wrote in verse 24. *For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* Paul was directly quoting from Isaiah 52:5 where God declared in his own words, "My name is continually blasphemed all day long." We know that Israel was more often than not, trapped in idolatry and pagan worship instead of worship directed at the One True God.

But Israel was created for a much higher purpose, as the prophet Jeremiah wrote. *For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen.* (Jeremiah 13:11)

As believers, we need to be chiefly concerned about God's reputation, glory and fame. Like the Jews, we were created to cling to Jesus. We are to be so enamored with God that we violently chafe at the mere thought of bringing harm to his reputation. We should be sickened when considering committing blasphemy against God's name. Yet this is exactly what hypocrisy does.

If you Google 'Doug Phillips', some of the top entries will be from secular newspapers, news sites and blogs. Many of them are rejoicing in his fall from grace. They celebrate because they are God-haters in the first place. But many of them celebrate because Phillips held to some very extreme views about women. He held to an extreme form of courtship which was little more than an arranged marriage between two fathers. Moreover, there is much evidence that Phillips was litigation happy. Being a lawyer himself, he has often initiated lawsuits against church members and others he hoped to intimidate. There are at least two websites dedicated to helping former

members of churches in his denomination recover from all kinds of abuses. Unfortunately, this extremism needed to be addressed but now it is laid out for all the world to see.

But when God's name is blasphemed, there is much more harm done.

2. Hypocrisy harms others.

Hypocrisy gives unbelievers more excuses for their unbelief. We have all heard the excuse dozens of times. “I'm never going to church because they are all filled with a bunch of hypocrites.” The hypocrisy excuse is absolutely lame in my opinion. There are two logical fallacies in this excuse. First, they assume that because *some* Christians are blatant hypocrites, *all* Christians are blatant hypocrites, and that simply is not true. The second mistake they make is that they cannot separate the truth about Jesus and Christianity from her followers. Just because some *people* do not follow the leader correctly does not mean the *leader* is not correct. Jesus and Christianity should be examined on its own merits. Nevertheless, as lame of an excuse as hypocrisy is, it is still a very convenient excuse. And the problem is that we continually hand this excuse to the unsaved world on a silver platter.

This is why Paul said that “God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” In context, the “you” was referring to the Jews, but the principle applies directly to us. God's name is blasphemed among the unsaved world because of us—you and me. The word blasphemy is so appropriate here because blasphemy is the opposite of worship. Let me ask you a question. What is the goal of evangelism? Our first response is to say that the goal of evangelism is to get people saved, so they don't go to hell. That is certainly part of it. But the real goal of evangelism is to increase worship of God. The goal of evangelism is to move people from blaspheming God to worshipping God. This is why I love the quote from John Piper: “missions exists because worship does not.” We do mission and we do evangelism so that worship is increased. We ought to be so enamored with Christ that we are compelled to tell others about him. We should be so taken with Jesus that we go to foreign lands or send money and people to foreign lands so that can know this same wonder and increase the fame and glory of God. We ought to be so enraptured with Jesus that we see and hate our hypocrisy because our hypocrisy causes the world to blaspheme. It causes them to not enter into worship of the one we love.

A leader within Vision Forum posted this on this past Tuesday. “The Vision Forum announcement last week sparked a flurry of discussion in and out of the Christian church. The sons and daughters of Belial screeched with glee...” By “sons of daughters of Belial” he means the unbelieving world. Can you see what is wrong with this statement? Of course the unbelieving world is celebrating because 2000 years ago Paul predicted that they would. This should not be a reason to blame the “gentiles” but rather the church. God would blame both of course, because all people are responsible for their own unbelief but the hypocritical Christians are a direct cause of this blasphemy. So very sad.

Hypocrisy also harms other people because we all tend to throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water. What I mean is that a man like Doug Phillips stood for a lot of good teaching. He championed issues like family discipleship, modesty, pro-life and homeschooling. These are all vital issues that should be addressed. But there are two problems with their teaching. The first is that they held these viewpoints in a legalistic manner. I had always known that they were a bit

extreme but I am just now understanding how extreme they are. They would fit into the category of people who claim that it is a sin to send your child to public school. You know that our family are proponents of homeschooling but I would never say such a thing. God may be strongly leading you to homeschool your kids and for you, it might be a sin to disobey him. Some people should be homeschooling their children but for others this is clearly not the best option. This is what legalism does though—it takes a good principle and absolutizes it. But now that you add this ugly layer of gross hypocrisy and most people who read about this will reject the important topics along with the man himself. That is unfortunate

This is unfortunate because we should be addressing these issues but in a balanced, Biblical manner. For example, we talk a lot about the importance of family discipleship. I mentioned this in my message on Richard Baxter a few weeks back. Churches should be teaching on Biblical gender roles, modesty, pro-life, etc, but people often cannot separate the hypocrite from his message and so they throw away both at the same time.

Furthermore, Jesus said that “It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”

3. Hypocrisy harms the hypocrite

The Greek word for hypocrisy is the same word used for an ancient actor on the stage who wore different masks to portray different people. Doug Phillips was clearly wearing a mask to hide his real self. Hypocrisy slowly kills the mask wearer.

This is why we need other people to help us see our hypocrisy. If we are blinded to it, it does not matter how many times we look into the mirror or delve deep into our hearts. We will not see it. We have been wearing a mask for so long that it no longer looks like a mask to us. We need fellow Christian brothers and sisters to come alongside of us and say, “Listen, can I tell you something? Were you aware you are wearing this mask—that you are two different people at times?” That's not an easy thing to do, but it is a necessary thing.

But it doesn't always go very well when we try to help someone caught in a web of hypocrisy. Listen to one man's description of his attempt to confront Doug Phillips.

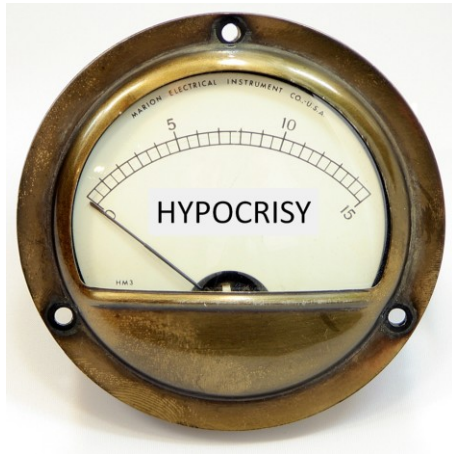
As soon as I caught wind of what was going on, I became very involved in working towards fulfilling the duties of friendship and brotherhood – to confront a man who has been like a father to me for a third of my life and plead with him to truthfully confess, and to genuinely take responsibility for longstanding betrayal of everything we had fought together for with the hope of ultimate restoration.

What for us was a tender, emotional, mission of mercy and plea for true repentance was met with something, and by someone I never could have imagined. Instead of being received as the “wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6), I was formally disowned and declared to be a “destroyer” to my face.

There is no way to describe the soul crushing blow I was dealt that day and it's overall impact on my life. Walking away from that meeting, I couldn't speak for hours I was so

stunned. I am still physically, emotionally and spiritually broken and asking God to give me wisdom.¹

Finally, hypocrisy harms the mask-wearer because it misses the mark of true worship. This is what Paul meant in verse 29. *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* Circumcision of course represents the ceremonial aspects of the law. Circumcision was an outward sign of the Jews' covenant with God but it was never meant to exist in a vacuum. A hypocrite is like a circumcised Jew. They look good on the outside and may talk a good talk but they are missing the mark of true worship.



Where are you at on the hypocrisy meter? Everyone of us registers somewhere on this scale so the only question is, how much do we have? How large is our mask? What are we trying to hide and why are we trying to hide it? Do you trust God to forgive you if you repent or is it just too frightening to think about removing the mask you have worn for so long?

This is why we need to invite others to look at our lives. We need to have relationships that are close enough and vulnerable enough where people are willing to confront us. How about you? Do you have even one person in your life who would be willing to call out your hypocrisy in a loving manner? Have you ever invited someone to call you out?

Think about it—if someone did call you out, how would you respond? Would you respond like Doug Phillips and reject the person trying to help you? Or would you be like King David who said, “Against you and you only have I sinned. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love.” We must be willing to confront others and be willing to be confronted. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

Rich Maurer
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¹Peter Bradrick: <http://jensgems.wordpress.com/2013/11/25/doug-phillips-and-blissful-ignorance/comment-page-1/#comment-19528>