

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church

Knoxville, Tennessee

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Six Bad Words in the Bible: 2. Hypocrite

Matthew 7:1-5

We are in a series on *Six Bad Words in the Bible*. You wouldn't think there are any bad words in the Bible, but there are. The word today is "*hypocrite*." He said these words in Matthew;

"Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ²For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

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In a sense, this is a cartoon! Picture one person standing there with a log hanging out of their eye trying, to remove a speck out of another person's eye. That would be funny if it weren't so tragic. It'd be funny if it weren't so true.

Why is it easier to deal with the speck in someone else's eye rather than with the log in my own? I don't want to deal with me. It's just easier to deal with you.

In fact, we have an arsenal of defenses to keep others from dealing with us; excuses, diversions, arguments, denials, projections, passive/aggressive behavior, and retribution. Oh and did I mention sulking? Works every time!

Why in the world would Jesus care about this kind of stuff anyway? There are way more serious problems in the world. So we judge each other a little bit. What's the real harm in that? Surely Jesus has bigger fish to fry.

But apparently not. Read the Gospels. The one thing that sets Jesus off more than anything else is hypocrisy. Who knew?

The word *hypocrite* is derived from a Greek word which means, "*one who is playing a part, or putting on a mask*." Greek actors were actually known as *hypocrites*, with no negative connotation. That's who they were, actors.

We're all actors. Ever been to a function you didn't want to attend and acted like you were glad to be there? (*That's called a Family Reunion!*)

But it can be way more serious than that. There are actors in medicine, education, sports, business, politics and religion. There are people who appear to be one thing, but in reality are something else. Something deceptive. Hypocrisy is defined as *the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform.*

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So how is Jesus going to build a church if everybody in it is acting? That's not going to bring in the kingdom or change the world. So this is a big deal. It's a huge deal. He's either got to fix this or lose the game.

This is how much he couldn't stand hypocrisy. These are his words;

'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you block people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.' (Matt. 23:13-14)

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.' (Matt. 23:23-24)

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.' (23:25)

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white washed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.' (23:27)

He's not happy. It seems Jesus had an easier time being with people who were sinful, and they knew it, than he did being with those who were self-righteous and *hypocritical* – playing a part, or putting on a mask.

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In psychology the term is "*persona*." Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung gives us the concept. The word literally means, "*mask*." We all wear them, but the question is how thick is the mask? We run the risk of projecting to others what we think they want to see and in turn, lose our true selves. The persona becomes our external personality, and our true self becomes smothered and lost. We're acting.

If some catastrophe comes along and shatters our mask, we can no longer "*act*" or play a role. The mask has been stripped away. That creates a personal crisis.

Rather than explore who we are, we are tempted to patch the mask and get it back up as quickly as possible, cracks and all. It's an exhausting process, as you can well imagine.

We all have to play a character from time to time. Every person has a persona, a mask he/she wears in their daily life and work. No one goes around

being raw and open all the time. When someone asks us how we are doing, we always say “*Fine,*” even if we don’t mean it!

At times we may need our mask, but there are other times when it becomes an obstacle to our relationship with God, with one another, and even with our self.

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Christians have forever been accused of hypocrisy. On more than one occasion I’ve had someone say to me,

‘I don’t go to church anymore. You see people at church who sing, and pray and play the part, and then you see them outside of church and they are totally different. They are greedy and bullish in business. They will cheat you in a heartbeat. The way they live doesn’t reflect what they claim to be.’

My usual response is to say, “*That’s true. You ought to join us. You’d fit right in!*”

Christians can be disappointing to the world.

We’re sinful and broken, and sometimes that ends up on the front page of the paper, or on the news. Some Christians become arrogant and self-righteous. Others are extremely judgmental of others, showing very little of the compassion of Christ. We fight over the Bible and a host of other issues. There seems to be very little unity with other denominations and little tolerance for other religions.

Our mission work can look like top-down charity, with no intentions of really getting to know someone who lives on the other side of the fence, or doing anything to remove the fence.

At times we seem consumed with our own survival and we talk way too much about money and numbers and less about relationships, justice, mercy and faith.

Who would want to join that church? Not me! If it weren’t for the grace of God, we’d have nothing!

“*Hypocrite*” is a bad word in the Bible. We can’t be the Church if we are acting. Others won’t want to join you if you are.

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Jesus put it this way;

³Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your neighbor’s eye.

If you do the work of removing the log in your eye, you will be more tender in dealing with the speck in someone else's. We might not be so judgmental. Wouldn't that be a more attractive church? Wouldn't that be a different kind of world? Maybe that's what Jesus was thinking!

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: **Amen**