

**Christ Described the Correct
Meaning of Hypocrisy!
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Since the historic Fall, as mentioned in Genesis chapter 3, the world has always had false religion and false religious leaders; pretending to stand for the living God, but in fact, they are only representing themselves. False religious-worship is seen in the attitude of Cane's offering to the Almighty (Gen. 4). In Cain was the *germ* of all false religion, and *attitude* of all false religious leaders.

False religious leaders were active in a rebellious scheme to erect their Tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-4). False religious leaders were seen to be in conflict with Moses in Egypt. Moses encountered Pharaoh's sorcerers and magicians who relied on satanic occult powers, to resist and oppose Moses (see, Exodus 7:11-12, 22; 8:7). The nation of Israel was warned against the sins of forgetting the living God, including the sins of idolatry, the tolerance of evil, of wickedness, of accepting the sins of the surrounding nations, and compromise, after they got over into Canaan—the Promise Land (Deut. 6:10-12; 8:11-18). Ezekiel faced the false prophets in Israel, whom God called “foolish prophets who are following their *own* spirit and have seen nothing” (Ezek. 13:3).

During the life and time of Jesus the Messiah, the religious leaders of the Jewish nation presumed to honor Christ as a prophet, a great teacher, or even as one among many [Gods], but they vehemently oppose Him, and the truth of God, which Christ taught.

Whatever He said was related to His kingdom, the Kingdom of God was the *subject* with which His ministry began (Matt. 4:17) and He ended with the same (Acts 1:7). In a parallel account, Luke reported that Jesus was “teaching daily in the temple, . . . preaching the Gospel” (Luke 19:47; 20:1), which was sometimes called “the Gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 9:35).

Jesus often engaged in head on clashes with the elders of the Jewish people. The Elders of Israel comprised a wide variety of religious leaders, which included the Pharisees and Scribes, and possibly Sadducees, Herodians and even some Zealots.

The life and teachings of the Messiah were clear, forceful, and publicly devastating to the religious leaders and their establishment; and while it was happening, they were mute and powerless to do anything about it.

“Jesus taught with power and authority, because His power, and His authority were from the Living God (John 5:21, 26; 6:38; 44, 57; 7:16, 28; 8:18, 54). Because He had God's power and

authority, He sought no human authority, or credentials.”¹ In so doing, He set Himself directly as the antitheses, to the Jewish religious leaders, and incurred their unrelenting wrath. The Jewish leadership was appalled, because Christ condemned them.

In Matthew chapter 23, we have recorded for us Jesus’ last public sermon. It was a sobering message, and of an outright, scathing, savage, denunciation, and a condemnation of, and against the hypocritical, false teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees. Christ warned against false religious leaders in Israel, and warned His followers *not* to emulate them.

Christ referred to, and warned against spurious leaders as “false Christ and false prophets [who] will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). He also called them “. . . children of the devil” (John 8:44). Paul called them preachers of a perverted Gospel (Gal.1:8), and carriers of doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1). Peter described them as those who “secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1). John called them; ‘antichrists’ and ‘lawbreakers’ who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, (1 John 2:18, 22 and 3:4). Jude described them as dreamers who “defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties” (Jude 8). Paul said to the Ephesian elders; that the false religious teachers are “savage wolves” from an evil spirit world whose objective is to corrupt, destroy, and enslave God’s people, with falsehoods (Acts 20:29). Later in the Philippian letter, Paul called the false teachers “dogs.” They are the ones who always would tear up, and mutilate the true work of God (Phil 3:2).

During His public ministry as recorded in the New Testament pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Master leveled the charges against the Pharisees, with open and blatant hypocrisy. This charge was hammered home five times in Matthew’s narrative (Matt. 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 27, and 29, one discourse). Another discourse on the charge of hypocrisy, is recorded in Mark 7:6, and in Luke 12:1. In addition to this charge, He also pointed out and rebuked them for having; “a conceited self-righteousness” (Matt. 5:30), being an “evil and adulterous and wicked generation” (Matt.12: 39), having a dubious, evil, corrupt, harmful, and a misguided influence in their teaching (Matt. 16:6, 12), for having the love of money (Luke 16:14), and being egotistically self-righteous (Luke 18:1-12).

In Matthew chapter 23, the Master zeroed in on the *attitude, actions*, and the *fruit* of Pharisaic hypocrisy. Christ

¹John MacArthur, *Commentary On Matthew 16-23*, Moody Bible Institute, (Chicago; Illinois, 1988), p. 286.

charged them with several *woes*, often He said to them, “Woe to you!” This phrase is mentioned nine times in this context.

Christ used the word *hypocrite* in this chapter again and again. The Greek word that is used here for hypocrite; is translated as an *actor*, or a *pretender*, one who acts out a part, one who wears a mask to cover his true feelings, one who puts on an external show while inwardly his thoughts and feelings are very different or, one of indifference.

To the Scribes and Pharisees, their whole idea of religion consisted in outward observances, cosmetics, --only for the flesh and in the meticulous observance of the rules and regulations of the Old Testament Law. But in their hearts, as Jesus pointed out; there was envy, pride, idolatry, hatred, bitterness, covetousness, arrogance, and no love for God. They preferred their own idea of religion to God’s idea of true religion. They substituted their human made traditions for the truth of God (Matt. 15:3-9).

The Master accused them of being missionaries of *evil*. The evil, the *sin* here was the *essence* of their hypocrisy; because they were “not really seeking to lead people to the living God, but they were seeking to *convert* and proselyte the people to themselves,”² and to their dead Pharisaical system (Matt. 23:15-16). The Pharisees thought that they were the gateway to God’s kingdom, and heaven, and held that they had a monopoly on God’s immutable truth.

The list of hypocritical charges included: (i) placing burdens on others they refused to accept, (ii) their controlling motivation was the hunger for praise and honor, (iii) they deliberately kept people from entering the kingdom, (iv) because of their influence, their converts were two more fold sons of hell than themselves, (v) they made artificial, meaningless religious distinction, (vi) their concern for minutia obscured matters of grave importance, (vii) they were concerned about the appearance of purity, and not about being pure, (viii) They honored the prophets while holding the attitudes of those who had killed the prophets (Matt. 23:4, 5-6,13,15,16-22, 23-24, 25-28, 29-36).

These charges were based on the religious influence of their lives, and were leveled against their wrong, wicked, ungodly, personal spiritual motivations, and against all their misrepresentation of *the intent* of sacred Scriptures.

It is very clear that the Master’s own concept and definition of hypocrisy, when compared to the concept of hypocrisy today, that they are two egregiously different concepts. The definition of a hypocrite today is; a shallow, insincere person who consciously

²William Barclay, *Commentary On The Gospel Of Matthew, Vol. 2*, (The Westminster Press; Philadelphia), Revised Edit. 1975, p. 291.

and knowingly is dedicated to deceiving other people about his/her spiritual commitment. He/she deliberately creates and wears a false religious front. He knows he is a hypocrite. Not often will a Christian regard another religious person as being hypocritical if that person is obviously sincere in his convictions. Such a person may be accused of being wrong, mistaken, or in error, but not being charged with hypocrisy.

But Christ looked into the hearts of the religious leaders of His day, their motives, their actions, their attitude, and condemned them for their hypocrisy, their evil, and perverse wickedness, because *hypocrisy* shrivels up and recoils the human soul in darkness.

The evil and the sins of the Pharisaic remain in the world, and even in today's Christianity. This Pharisaic individuals claims to obey God in essence, is cosmetic; and in their actions, they deny that He has any place in their hearts.

Summary:

Christ said: "Truly I say to you that the tax-collectors, and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31b-32). In that day the two groups of people were considered the scum of society, perhaps even worse than Gentiles.

The tax collectors were extortionist, and traitors to their own people. The harlots were the epitome of gross immorality. The hypocritical, self-righteous Jews thought that these people were beyond the reach of the mercy of God, but Christ disputed their claim by pointing out, that religion does not qualify a person to enter the kingdom, and even gross sins and immorality, when confessed and repented of, will not keep a person out.

Even the tax-collectors, the harlots, and the vilest of sinners; upon hearing the message of the Gospel, believing in its power, and obeying it, will be convicted, can be saved, and be totally transformed.

The greatest of all heresies next to the denial of the Lordship of Christ's power to save and deliver man from sin, *is that* wicked and sinful belief held by any group of Christian believers that it has a monopoly on God, or on His truth, or that any group of believers *is the only* gateway to God's kingdom.

The Church in *not* the gateway to God's kingdom, or heaven, but it is the risen and living Christ who is the gateway to God and His kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Therefore, is it imperative that the church and its missionaries seek to bring converts to the risen and living Christ, and under His sovereign Lordship!