

## Introduction:

We are continuing our series “Nails of the Cross,” where each week we will look at a different sin that the church struggles with, and as we journey towards the cross and resurrection, we will be reminded that Jesus took the nails at the cross in order to save us from those sins. This morning, we are going to look at the sin of ‘hypocrisy.’

So let’s start simply by establishing a common understanding of what hypocrisy is. Hypocrisy is to claim some moral code or belief, and to contradict that belief through your behavior or attitude.

Think about that old parental favorite “Do as I say, not as I do.” Let’s say your kids are fighting, and you tell them not to yell at each other, but you find yourself yelling at one of them an hour later for something they are doing. “Do as I say, not as I do.” Your heart is in the right place; you’re ultimately trying to teach your children that even when disagreeing it’s not okay to yell. But you yourself can’t seem to follow your own rules.

In an article from Psychology Today on hypocrisy, the author cites a study done by USC on moral hypocrisy; in their study, the researchers boil moral hypocrisy down to three types:

**i. Moral Duplicity:** This is basically when we falsely claim our intentions are pure, but in fact they are not.; we might also think about this as lying.

**ii. Moral Double Standards:** This happens when we are much more critical of others who do potentially immoral things than we are with ourselves. We may get upset when somebody with clearly more than 15 items goes through the 15 items-or-less lane at the grocery store, but if every other lane is full and we are in a hurry, we might ashamedly take our full cart through the same lane just to get out of the store more quickly.

**iii. Moral weakness:** This is when our behavior does not match our attitudes and intentions. As an example, we might tell people we think a certain ballot issue is important, but when voting day rolls around we fail to make it to the polls in time.

The researchers asked a group of people what their most important values were, what actions they had taken that were either consistent or inconsistent with those values, and what action they had taken most recently that they felt guiltiest about.

The people taking part in the study listed honesty, loyalty, fairness, and care as their most important values; the researchers found that the group was most likely to violate the values of honesty and loyalty through lying to their friends or family and that these actions were the things they felt guiltiest about.

So, why do we act hypocritically? I can think of a few reasons:

- We want to make ourselves look better than we are
- We want to get in with a certain person or group

-We want to have our cake and eat it too; we want to say we have convictions and morals, but at the same time we want to do what we want to do.

-We all are made in the image of God, and we all live in a world fallen to sin and have sinful desires within us.

But, ultimately what lies at the center of hypocrisy is misalignment. Our hearts, our minds, our words, and our actions are out of alignment. When we commit one of those areas to God, but leave other areas up to ourselves, we are misaligned. What happens when your car is out of alignment? The tires pull in a certain direction, so you are forced to correct the wheel in order to stay straight, which causes uneven wear on the tires and can eventually destroy the tire. When our lives are out of alignment, we get worn down by trying to hold it all together and make it all look like we are “good” and “Christian.” And just like a misaligned car, we are in danger of wearing down and eventually going flat.

In the Matthew passage read this morning, the Pharisees, Jewish religious leaders who strictly followed and enforced the law, approached Jesus and his disciples and challenged them for breaking the law by not washing their hands before they ate. First of all, *gross*. But Jesus took this opportunity to turn their accusations back against them and teach a lesson on religious hypocrisy. First, he pointed out that they had a ***moral double standard***. While they were so eager to point out when others broke the law, they themselves weren't keeping the law to honor their parents. He specifically noted that they were

***morally duplicitous***; they were claiming something was important to them when it was very clear by their attitudes and actions that this was untrue. They said that the law was important, and yet they would break the law for their own gains. Jesus then cites the prophet Isaiah, who had much to say about the hypocrisy of Israel and her ***moral duplicity***: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

Jesus had a lot to say throughout his ministry about the importance of aligning our words, our actions, and our hearts in order to truly be on the journey of discipleship, and he was never afraid to challenge a religious person who was being a hypocrite by boasting about his righteousness.

This morning we are going to look at three types of hypocrisy found in Scripture and consider what it means to be hypocritical disciples living under the grace of God.

## **A) 3 Types of Hypocrisy**

### **1) Hypocrisy of Words**

James writes that the tongue is a powerful tool and that our words can be used for both good and evil.

#### **James 3:3-5, 9-10**

<sup>3</sup> When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. <sup>4</sup> Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the

pilot wants to go. <sup>5</sup> Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark... <sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing."

He tells us that although the tongue may be a small part of the human body, what we do with it has enormous power to shape our character, our lives, and the lives of people around us. He tells us that it is a rudder, it can steer the course of our ships. That's a good thing, we can use our speech to lead us to where we are going and to steer us around danger. But he also tells us that it is a small spark, which has the power to burn a whole forest down. Anyone who has seen reports on the forest fires that have been wrecking California knows how deadly and destructive a small spark can be

Our words can be used to Praise our God and they can in the same breath be used to curse other people, people made in the very image of God and called "good."

I was listening to a podcast the other day that was interviewing the singer of a Christian band from the mid 90's to the early 2000's called The Supertones. Because the style of music they were playing was pretty popular at the time in both Christian and secular music, they had chances to play in churches and in bars and clubs. The singer talked about how they were very clear that their mission as a band was to share Jesus in their

music and out loud at their shows, and they weren't going to change it no matter what. He recalled a time they were booked on a show with several other punk bands, and the crowd was really getting into the music and dancing along. But when he finally said that they play music for Jesus, the crowd booed pretty loudly. Then he made a statement that really stood out to me. He said if you were Christians in a band, but you didn't feel like it was your mission to preach, and you didn't do so in churches or in clubs that was perfectly fine. But if you were Christians in a band and you preached at churches but stayed quiet about your faith when playing around secular crowds, then you were a sellout. That's hypocrisy of Words.

I wonder, in what ways are we hypocritical with our words? The truth is even if we can recite the most Scripture, sing the most beautiful songs of praise, talk constantly about being a witness for Jesus in the world or even share the word of God with our children, if we also use that same tongue to tear others down through gossip and judgement, to be crude in order to impress others, to lie, or even if we silence our tongues around certain people so that we aren't sharing our convictions about Christ, we are being hypocritical.

## **2) Hypocrisy of Actions**

The second kind of hypocrisy is hypocrisy of actions. This means we aren't walking the walk, acting according to our heart convictions, or walking the talk, acting according to our words.

There's also hypocrisy of righteous actions, where we do the right things in front of others in order to get praise. Jesus says in Matthew 6:1 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."

In a very confessional part of the letter to Romans, Paul writes about his own hypocrisy of actions, and his inability to do good, even though it is the deepest desire of his heart.

### **Romans 7:15-18**

<sup>15</sup> I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

In this passage, Paul admits that he has moral weakness, he wants to do good, but no matter how hard he tries he can't. Instead of the good he hopes to do, Paul does evil. But the key to understanding this passage, and to understanding the root of hypocrisy, the root of our misalignment, is his admission that he can't always do good because sin lives within him.

We all act hypocritically, whether we do good things so that others will praise us, or whether we intentionally or unintentionally act against our moral convictions. How might recognizing, like Paul, that it is because of sin in our lives that

we act hypocritically change the way that we look at those actions?

### **3) Hypocrisy of Heart**

The final type of hypocrisy is hypocrisy of the heart. If our heart is out of alignment with our words or our deeds, then we will no doubt act hypocritically.

Jesus states in **Matthew 15:8-9**, that heart misalignment leads to hypocrisy in words and heart.

<sup>8</sup> ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

The heart is the seat of discipleship, and it is the seat of hypocrisy. If our heart is centered on Christ, then we have the ability to align our words and actions with our heart and grow in discipleship. When our words or actions get out of alignment with our heart they become hypocrisy. If our heart is not centered on Christ, then any good action we do or good thing we say is hypocrisy as well.

This is why Solomon says in **Proverbs 4:23**:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

**Transition: So we see that there are three types of hypocrisy: hypocrisy of words, actions, and hearts. The question then is, who are we to be in light of this?**



## **B) Who are we to be?**

Is it possible to not be hypocritical? Yes and no.

The first and most obvious answer is no. If we claim Jesus Christ as our model for life, we are going to sin and do, say, and feel ways that are contrary to who Jesus is. We are all like Paul, doing and saying and having hearts opposite of what we wish because sin lives within us. And until we die or Christ returns, that will never change.

But, the second and less obvious answer is that it is possible to not be a hypocrite, if we hold two core convictions. We have to acknowledge that first we are followers of Jesus and second, we are not perfect and we don't claim to be. This means we have to be willing to surrender our Christian masks (and we all have Christian masks of some kind) to honesty and transparency with ourselves, with others, and with the world, then even though we will definitely fail when trying to follow Jesus, we won't be hypocrites because we won't claim perfection. And we acknowledge that it is only by the grace of God that we move forward.

We will all say hypocritical things, do hypocritical things, and have hypocritical attitudes. The bigger sin is whether or not we are struggling against our hypocritical tendencies and if we have become comfortable with living misaligned lives. And maybe the first question we should ask ourselves is: are we even aware of the areas of misalignment?

The good news is God's grace covers our hypocrisy and failure to align our hearts, words, and actions. And so not only are we not left alone to our own abilities, but his grace in our weakness makes us strong. I'm going to close this morning with an encouragement from the Apostle Paul from **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9-10**: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.