

Hypocrisy Unmasked

Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 23:27-28

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There was not a class of people that Christ condemned more severely than hypocrites (Matthew 23:27-28). For the hypocrite assumes outwardly a role of being just, merciful, and humble toward God and others, but inwardly is insincere, lukewarm, and self-righteous. Perhaps that which is most sobering about this sin is not only its potential to deceive others, but its potential to deceive oneself. When hypocrisy takes root in a person's heart, it brings with it a blindness and self-delusion so that one may think all is well when really all is not well. Hypocrisy deadens the pangs of conscience much like Tylenol deadens the pain of a migraine headache. Hypocrisy can send a man whistling all the way to hell.

How does hypocrisy manifest itself in your life and mine? We can go through the mere motions of prayer, singing the psalms, listening to the reading and preaching of God's Word and our hearts yet be lukewarm, yea even cold toward the Lord. We can outwardly profess our love for the brethren, but in our hearts despise and disregard them. We can be a model of moral purity before others, but secretly feed on pornography and every lustful thought. We can receive the forgiveness of sin as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ, and yet refuse to forgive those who have sinned against us.

This Lord's Day we hear the response of Israel to the covenant lawsuit God brought against her. Rather than falling upon her face in sincere faith and repentance, she boasts in the presence of God, offering to the Lord her hypocritical acts of worship. The Lord removes the mask of Israel's hypocrisy for all to see. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Israel Offers a Mere Show of Hypocrisy (Micah 6:6-7); (2) God Seeks a Sincere Display of Grace (Micah 6:8).

I. Israel Offers a Mere Show of Hypocrisy (6:6-7).

A. There is a dialogue going on between God and His people in Micah 6. First, the Lord presents His covenant lawsuit against Israel for her unfaithfulness, and gives specific examples of His unfailing faithfulness to the marriage covenant with Israel (Micah 6:1-5). Second, Israel seeks to deflect the charges of the Lord by pointing to her outward observance of various forms of worship (Micah 6:6-7). Third, the Lord rebukes His people by exposing her mere formalism and her absence of sincere and true religion (Micah 6:8).

B. The question asked at the beginning of Micah 6:6 is a great question if asked with sincerity: "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God?" That is precisely the question one should ask before coming into God's presence to worship Him. How should I approach God? What does God require of me that I might worship Him acceptably? Micah 6:7 asks the same question in different words: "Will the LORD be pleased with my offering?" Here are questions which strike at the very heart of our worship. How do we know with certainty that God will be pleased with our worship unless He has told us what He wants us to bring? "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Whatever we offer to God by way of worship must be offered in faith. But faith must be exercised in God's Word not in man's word or man's will. If we assume that we may bring to God whatever He has not forbidden in His Word (rather than what He has authorized), then why did the Lord not regard the offering of **Cain** when he brought the fruit of the ground? Cain did not have God's authorization to bring the fruit of the ground, whereas Abel had God's authorization to bring a firstling from his flock and the fat thereof (Genesis 4:4). Why did God not receive the offering of **Nadab and Abihu** (Leviticus 10:1), but rather strike them dead? Because they offered strange fire which He had not commanded. How do you know whether the use of uninspired hymns in corporate worship is pleasing or displeasing to the Lord? How do you know whether celebrating Christmas or Easter is pleasing or

displeasing to the Lord? Has He told you in His Word that it is pleasing to Him? No He has not. Then you must not offer it to Him in worship (for you cannot do so with faith if it is not taught in Scripture). But the outward form of worship is not the only aspect of worship which we offer to God. In addition to the outward form, we are to offer to God our inward faith, love, and thanksgiving (John 4:22-23—not only using the appointed and truthful forms of worship, but also using the Spirit wrought graces of faith, repentance, and love in worship). Even if we have the right outward forms of worship to offer to Him, if we do not have the right inward graces as well, the Lord will not receive our worship. It will be mere hypocrisy.

C. So you see, there is nothing wrong with the questions in and of themselves that are asked in Micah 6:6-7. However, these questions form Israel's self-justification against the Lord's covenant lawsuit. The Lord charges Israel with unfaithfulness to her marriage covenant. Israel in effect says, "Unfaithful? What do you expect from us? Shall we bring our yearling calves as burnt offerings before thee? Shall we bring thousands of rams to thee and include in our meal offerings enough oil to fill a river? Shall we even offer our first-born as sacrificial offerings for our sin?" Now obviously, God never authorized the sacrifice of their children as acceptable worship, but it would seem that they were looking for the greatest sacrifice they might offer so as to justify their present outward performance before a holy God. Israel defends herself by saying in effect, "How then are we charged for being unfaithful to Thee? Don't all our outward ceremonies and forms of worship demonstrate that we have been a faithful bride? What more could God expect from us?"

D. Consider what the Lord says through Isaiah (Micah's contemporary) in **Isaiah 1:10-15** where Israel is rebuked for this same hypocrisy in their worship and life. God is fed up with Israel's outward hypocrisy and her mere formal, legal, and external religion. Dear ones, the Lord despises hypocritical lukewarmness not only in a church, but also in a family, and in the lives of professing believers. Christ finds revolting to Him all insincere worship and obedience, all indifference to the gracious invitations of Christ, all hypocritical double standards whereby we judge others by a stricter standard than the one we use on ourselves, and all nauseating lukewarmness in the cause of Christ.

E. Dear ones, this hypocrisy may take different forms in our lives. I'll mention just two at this time.

1. The first form of hypocrisy is that which is associated with the Romish Church. This form of hypocrisy has a zeal, but not according to knowledge. It is not only members of the Romish Church who have their acts of penance whereby they pay the Lord off so that He won't be angry with them anymore. It's not only Rome that seeks to appease the Most High God with her mere outward ceremonies as if He were a pagan god. Don't we bargain with God as well (trying to buy relief from an aching conscience) when we punish ourselves for our sin by reading an extra chapter from the Bible, by praying an extra hour, by fasting an extra day each week or each month, by calling ourselves vile names for our sin, by giving up this habit or that habit, by making this sacrifice or that sacrifice, etc.? When we perform our good works from a desire to punish ourselves for sin (rather than performing them from hearts of faith, love, and thanksgiving to Christ for His great love to us), how do we differ from Rome? Dear ones, all such actions on our part are nothing more than Protestant forms of penance and paying God off for our guilty conscience. We may not pray the rosary. We may not crawl on our knees up stone steps and kiss an image of a saint. We may not observe lent and give up meat, but we have fallen into the same hypocrisy as Rome, for we have offered our works to God in exchange for a clear conscience and assurance of forgiveness of sin. What does the Lord say to all this? Consider the liberty that is ours in Christ (Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 10:4-10,14). Yes, I know the sinful tendency that is in the heart of man to appease an angry God by our good works. But can't we see that this is an abomination to the Lord? Can't we see that such behavior pours contempt upon the sacrifice of Christ and implies that Christ's death and resurrection is not enough? In so doing we have supplanted the Covenant of Grace with the Covenant of Works. That is one form of hypocrisy into which Israel of old fell.

2. The second form of hypocrisy which we must avoid is like that of so many of the

Pharisees, who performed their works of religion from no zeal for the Lord but from a desire to receive the applause of men (Matthew 23:5; John 12:42-43). Such was the form of hypocrisy that seems to have moved Ananias and Sapphira to sell their property and to give it to the church (Acts 5). They were trying to keep up with the other members of the church who were doing so (except others did so not from hypocrisy, but from hearts filled with love to Christ and filled with mercy to their brethren). This second form of hypocrisy proceeds from an apathy in the heart for Christ and the things of the Lord. In this heart there is an indifference to a close communion with Christ and fervency in prayer, a complacency in sincere love for the Lord or in brokenness of heart over sin committed against Christ, a lukewarmness in zeal to defend the least truth for the honor and glory of Christ, or an uncaring heart for the needs of our brethren. This is the person who is only looking for the easiest and most comfortable path to travel. The acts of worship and obedience (in this case) are done more from the motive, “What will others think if I don’t do it?” rather than from the motive, “How can I demonstrate my love for the Lord for all His many benefits toward me or my love for my brethren?” This is the form of hypocrisy that simply goes through the outward forms of worship and obedience—the form of hypocrisy that is simply there in body, but not in spirit. Has thanksgiving at meals become so rote, a vain repetition? How do you listen to the reading and preaching of God’s Word? Have the outward forms of worship become more important to you than the faith, love, and thanksgiving expressed from the heart by means of those forms? This form of hypocrisy tunes out the Spirit of God who speaks to us by His Word. Hypocrisy reveals itself by blaming others for our own spiritual dryness (whether the minister, the elders, the members of the congregation, husband, wife, children, the world, etc.).

F. How shall we see hypocrisy crucified in our lives?

1. We must embrace Christ as our only hope of eternal salvation, as our only hope of a clear conscience, as our only hope of being sincere in faith and life, as our only hope of peace, joy, and contentment. Only He can purge our minds, hearts, and lives from all hypocritical dead works to serve the living God. He died to set us free from hypocrisy.

2. We must draw near to the Lord and enjoy communion with Him through fervent prayer and study of His Word. At all times of worship, we must sincerely seek the blessing and imparting of grace by God’s Spirit so that worship does not become a mere ritual. Worship cannot be carelessly entered into if it would be offered from hearts of faith and love. To this end, the prayer of David in Psalm 139:23-24 ought to be always upon our lips.

3. We must hate hypocrisy as an enemy of God and as an enemy of our soul that would seek to destroy us. We hate it not only for what it will do to us, but for the very nature of the sin—a lack of sincere faith and love to Christ. Take full responsibility for your sin. Don’t shift blame to others for your spiritual dryness. Christ invites all to come to the living water to be refreshed. “Thou art the man.”

4. We must not serve the Lord either from a blind zeal or from a lukewarm heart. We are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

5. We must not let our right hand know what our left hand is doing when it comes to the praise of others. We must do all to the glory of Christ and be content with His, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

6. We must not allow the least sin to take root in our lives, for if we are **unfaithful** in little we will be **unfaithful** in much. A little hypocrisy tolerated in our lives will inevitably lead to a lot of hypocrisy.

II. God Seeks a Sincere Display of Grace (Micah 6:8).

A. The Lord now declares to Israel that it is foolish and hypocritical for her to act as though what God desires in worship is more than He has already revealed to them. Israel acted as though they had done all that they knew to do and that God was just expecting too much of them. In reality, Israel was simply seeking her own self-justification before God. The prophet Micah answers Israel on behalf of the Lord, “He hath

showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee.” The comments of Calvin are helpful at this point on this text:

Ye indeed pretend some concern for religion when ye approach God in prayer; but this your religion is nothing; it is nothing else than shamelessly to dissemble [i.e. to act hypocritically—GLP]; for ye sin not either through ignorance or misconception, but ye treat God with mockery.” How so? Because the Law teaches you with sufficient clearness what God requires from you; does it not plainly enough show you what is true reconciliation? But ye close your eyes to the teaching of the Law, and in the meantime pretend ignorance.

B. Hypocrites are willing to offer a portion of their wealth. They are willing to offer external worship according to certain forms. They are willing to make various sacrifices so as to go without food, clothing, and shelter. All these things they are willing to give up so as to be seen by others, but there is one thing a hypocrite is not willing to sacrifice nor to give up to God—his whole heart, all of his will, all of his mind, and all of his affections. Make no mistake about it—hypocrites are willing to make certain external sacrifices, but they are not willing to give themselves in their entirety to the Lord Jesus Christ as a living sacrifice. That a hypocrite cannot do, for a hypocrite cannot rise above his mere external religion to a religion of the heart, soul, and mind.

C. What has the Lord revealed to be the essence of true religion? Each of these must be viewed as graces supernaturally supplied by the Spirit of God through faith in the living God. These are not a set of rules by which we are justified before God, but rather they are the effect of God’s work of grace in the life of a true believer. These are the graces by which the Holy Spirit demonstrates His presence in the heart and life of every true child of God. These graces may not be evident to the same degree in the life of every Christian, for there are degrees of sanctification in the grace and knowledge of Christ. In the lives of Christians there are some who bring forth thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold harvest of God’s grace. But dear ones, where these graces are entirely missing in the life of a professing Christian, there will be hypocrisy, deception and playing a role. Correspondingly, where these fruits of true and sincere religion flourish in our lives, there hypocrisy will be subdued and conquered.

1. **“To do justly.”** Justice is that grace to deal fairly, honestly, and sincerely with our neighbor (in accordance with the rules of justice laid out in God’s Word). It is summarized in the words of Christ (Matthew 7:12). This grace of justice forbids all double standards, forbids all dishonesty in business, prohibits all covenant breaking, disallows all unlawful insubordination or tyranny, and condemns all immorality, lying, stealing, and bearing false witness. The grace of justice demonstrates itself by desiring and seeking the peace, purity, and unity of the church. It longs for and prays for righteousness to be manifested in the kingdoms of the world. Justice loves the truth and always seeks unity and peace in the truth. It sells all to buy the truth, and sells it not for any price. One who is just cannot live in unconfessed sin. His love for Christ and his love for holiness will not allow him to live there.

2. **“To love mercy.”** Mercy is that lovingkindness which is shown to our brethren and to our neighbor. Personal vengeance, unforgiveness, bitterness, personal hatred, unwillingness to help in time of need, and unwillingness to pursue reconciliation are all contradictions to that true religion of the heart. Rather, to love mercy implies we fervently pray for those who are without Christ. We weep over divisions in the body of Christ. We are willing to cover all sins that we can in love, knowing we are ourselves so inclined to many a sin (1 Corinthians 13). Mercy rejoices in the blessings, gifts, and prosperity of others. Both justice and mercy are shown to others (Second Table), but humility is a grace exercised toward God (First Table).

3. **“To walk humbly with our God.”** The grace of humility leads us away from our own righteousness and to the righteousness of Christ alone. Humility causes us to see so clearly our own unworthiness before a holy God and that there is nothing that we can offer the Lord in exchange for the

forgiveness of sin or a clean conscience. Humility boasts not in intelligence, giftedness, appearance, or riches, but boasts only in the cross of Christ, the love of Christ, and the grace of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:10). The lowliest job is not beneath humility to perform for the kingdom of Christ or for the edification of others. Humility puts not his confidence in the arm of flesh or in the resources of man, but rather in the Lord God alone (Publican and Pharisee). Nothing is impossible in the eyes of humility. Humility willingly accepts every crook in the road as from a caring, loving heavenly Father. Humility rejoices in suffering for the cause of Jesus Christ regardless of the personal cost. The humble person is teachable (he doesn't give the impression that he already knows it all). He rejoices in all of God's truth (from the least to the greatest), and humbly submits to it as being the supreme judge in all controversies of man. He who is humble is thankful to the Lord in all circumstances of life, for he knows that he deserves not the least mercy or blessing from God.

Humility is personified in Christ (Philippians 2:5-9). Those who humble themselves before God will be exalted by God. Jesus came to bring us a true religion that exists not only in outward forms, but more importantly in inward graces.

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