

## Lesson Nineteen **FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY**

We continue again tonight in our study of *Pilgrim's Progress*. We left the Pilgrim last week in a very troubled state. After coming to a thorough understanding of the gospel and having assurance of his salvation, then immediately he runs into three individuals named Simple, Sloth and Presumption. We found that these represented "religious indifference" to the things of God. These individuals were right close to the cross. In fact, they were described as just a little way out of the way. They were not true Christians, but they were close to the way. They were not antagonistic to the gospel, they were just indifferent to the gospel. We come across people like this today. When Simple was asked what his need was, he said "I see no danger, there is no danger for me." Sloth said "Just a little more sleep." That is, Sloth acknowledged that the danger of God's judgment was coming, but it wasn't imminent, it wasn't going to happen today, so just give me a little more sleep. Then Presumption presumed upon the mercy of God, believing that there would not be ANY judgment, but rather eventually everyone would be taken into the presence of the eternal God.

So after having absolutely no effect on religious indifference, the new Christian goes on his way. Tonight we find him encountering some more types of false pilgrims that true Christians will encounter in their lifetime. These false pilgrims are called **Formalist** and **Hypocrisy**. These are types of religious "self deception or insincerity." That is, these are people who are so deceived in a form of religion that they become hypocritical. They even deceive themselves into thinking that they are in a right relationship with God. These are the people that Christian would encounter foremost on his journey to the Celestial City. I will read to you this encounter from the book and then we will discuss these two personalities, Formalist and Hypocrisy. Christian is still thinking about his encounter with Simple, Sloth and Presumption, and we start with his thoughts:

**Yet he was troubled to think that men in that danger should so little esteem the kindness of him that so freely offered to help them, both by awakening of them, counseling of them, and proffering to help them off with their irons. And as he was troubled thereabout, he espied two men**

**come tumbling over the wall, on the left hand of the narrow way; and they made up apace to him.**

Now remember "the way" is Jesus Christ. He said, "***I am the way.***" (John 14: 6). You have to use your imagination here. How could a false person or a non-Christian be in "the way?" Notice they did not come by the way of the gate, but they hopped up over the wall. This "way" is Jesus Christ or the Way of the Cross. There is a song we sing called, "*The Way of the Cross Leads Home.*"<sup>1</sup> The Christian is now in the "way of the Cross, the way of self denial, the way of repentance, and the way of faith. As he is walking in that way, all of a sudden he comes in contact with two individuals who hop over the wall. Lets read about them.

**The name of the one was Formalist, and the name of the other Hypocrisy. So as I said, they drew up unto him, who thus entered with them into discourse.**

**Christian says, "Gentlemen, whence came you, and whither do you go?"**

**Formalist and Hypocrisy say, "We were born in the land of Vainglory, and are going for praise to Mount Zion."**

Here are some people who are very proud. They say they are going to heaven in order that they may be praised when they get there. We are introduced to the fact right off that if this is the true character of these persons, then obviously they are strangers to the true way of salvation which is Jesus Christ and His saving grace.

**Christian: Why came you not in at the gate which standeth at the beginning of the way? Know ye not that it is written, that "he that cometh not in by the door, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber?"<sup>2</sup>**

**They said, That to go to the gate for entrance was by all their countrymen counted too far about; and that, therefore, their usual way was to make a short cut of it, and to climb over the wall, as they had done.**

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<sup>1</sup> Jessie Brown Pounds

<sup>2</sup> John 10:1

Their reply to this was that all the people they were acquainted with and all of their friends think that the way of the cross was too involved and too detailed, so we just make a shortcut of it. There is no need to go to all that trouble by going in at the entrance, and so they climbed over the wall.

**Christian: But will it not be counted a trespass against the Lord of the city whither we are bound, thus to violate his revealed will?**

**They told him, That as for that, he needed not to trouble his head thereabout; for what they did they had custom for, and could produce, if need be, testimony that would witness it, for more than a thousand years.**

In essence they are saying, "Don't worry about it, there are a lot of people who have done it this way. For a thousand years, this is the way people have been going to heaven. This is the custom here in our country that we go to heaven just by this way." So they said by all of this, don't you trouble your head about us not being in the way.

**But, said Christian, will your practice stand a trial at law?**

Will you be able to stand at the judgment?

**They told him, That custom, it being of so long standing as above a thousand years, would doubtless now be admitted as a thing legal by an impartial judge.**

That is, we have been doing this for so long, that it has become such a custom, surely any judge would recognize that it is now an established way. No, there is no problem.

**And besides, say they, if we get into the way, what matter is it which way we get in? If we are in, we are in: thou art but in the way, who, as we perceive, came in at the gate; and we also are in the way, that came tumbling over the wall; wherein now is thy condition better than ours?**

**Christian: I walk by the rule of my Master; you walk by the rude working of your fancies. You are counted thieves already by the Lord of the way; therefore I doubt you will not be found true men at the end of the way. You come in by yourselves without his direction, and shall go out by yourselves, without his mercy.**

**To this they made him but little answer; only they bid him look to himself. Then I saw that they went on, every man in his way, without much conference one with another, save that these two men told Christian, that as to laws and ordinances, they doubted not but that they should as conscientiously do them as he. Therefore, said they, we see not wherein thou differest from us, but by the coat that is on thy back, which was, as we see, was given thee by some of thy neighbors, to hide the shame of thy nakedness.**

**Christian replied, By laws and ordinances you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door. And as for this coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go; and that, as you say, to cover my nakedness with. And I take it as a token of kindness to me, for I had nothing but rags before. And besides, thus I comfort myself as I go. Surely, think I, when I come to the gate of the city, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his coat on my back; a coat that he gave me freely in the day that he stripped me of my rags. I have, moreover, a mark in my forehead, of which perhaps you have taken no notice, which one of my Lord's most intimate associates fixed there in the day that my burden fell off my shoulders. I will tell you, moreover, that I had then given me a roll sealed, to comfort me, by reading as I go on the way: I was also bid to give it in at the celestial gate, in token of my certain going in after it; all which things I doubt you want, and want them because you came not in at the gate.**

**To these things they gave him no answer, only they looked upon each other, and laughed.**

So now we have an encounter with Formalist and Hypocrisy. Again, these are people or attitudes that reflect religious self-deception, or sincerity. These are mock Christians, not true Christians. These are individuals like the chameleon, the little lizard who is never really himself, in the sense that he changes his color for whatever party he is in. Formalist and Hypocrisy have a form of religion that allows them to blend in with whatever group they may happen to be with. So they are not true Christians that the Bible speaks of, they are but Formalists and Hypocrites. They were born in the land of Vainglory and on the way to Mt. Zion. They were going to heaven in order to receive praise there by the Lord of the heavens.

So when they were confronted that they should come in at the gate, they said, "No, we made a shortcut." Why didn't they want to come in at the gate? The gate is none other than being introduced to the living Savior Himself. Now this is what makes a formal religionist. This is what makes a Hypocrite. They will have all of the external rites and ceremonies which

are proper, except they are strangers to the living Lord and Savior who is in the gospel. All they want are the forms of religion, ordinances and things of this nature, but they are strangers to the living Lord Jesus Christ. And because there are so many of them, then they can argue, "Why get excited, everybody is doing the same thing."

What was Bunyan's concern, and what was he trying to tell us? Back then in Bunyan's time, there was a huge number of people in the Church of England who were not true Christians, and we have the same condition today. That is, most of so-called "Christianity" here in the United States of America, is found in these two individuals, Formalist and Hypocrisy. I read a few days ago that there are approximately 110 million church members in the USA. Do you really believe that we would have all the problems that we have in our country today if all those people were real Christians? Certainly not! What is the trouble? Most of them are Formalists and Hypocrites. So this is very up-to-date, because it is dealing with contemporary religion—a religion which does not come in by the gate. It ignores a vital personal, internal, spiritual relationship with Jesus Himself and just takes the teachings of Christianity and turns them into a form, so that a person can develop from a Formalist right into a Hypocrite. So when you try to make a shortcut out of religion, it will lead nowhere and it will save no one.

Now lets look at Formalist. Who is he? He is an individual who has a form of religion that is just external. He is a stranger to the internal workings of grace. He is described by the Apostle Paul in II Timothy 3:5, as **"having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."** He majors on external forms. He can sing, be baptized, pray, give a testimony, take the Lord's supper and go through all of the forms, but he is a stranger to the power of godliness which is only that which is able to change the heart to a true love of Jesus Christ in the gospel. He can go through all these forms, but that is all he is, a Formalist.

Then lets look at his partner whose name is Hypocrisy. Most of us here tonight know what a hypocrite is. A hypocrite is a person who is saying he is something, when in reality he is not. If I would take a survey here tonight of those who are of the age to understand what the meaning of a word is, I don't believe there is a person here this evening who would vote that they would like to spend time with hypocrites. I have never come across anyone who said they loved to be around hypocrites. In fact, that is one of the first objections that I usually get as a pastor when I go out and invite people to church. That is probably one of the

biggest objections that the non-church member has to coming to church, that the church is filled with hypocrites. So people do not love to be around hypocrites. But isn't it a strange thing, that you can never find one of these hypocrites? When I ask the question, let all the hypocrites stand up, where are they? Everyone doesn't like a hypocrite, but no one is a hypocrite. Lets look into the Bible and see that a hypocrite is one who is self-deceived. A hypocrite does not know that he is a hypocrite. How many of you know what the Pharisees were? What did Jesus call the Pharisees? He called them hypocrites. Do you really believe that the Pharisees believed they were hypocrites? No, they thought they were the furthest thing from being a hypocrite. They believed themselves to be the true people of Jehovah God. However, it is possible for a person to be so self-assured that he is one of God's people, that he can be deceived and become hypocritical.

Now, just to put ourselves to the test, lets look in the Bible and examine some things. Do we dare do so? Lets put our religion to the test to see if we are Formalists and/or Hypocrites. I trust that we will prove to be what God would have us to be. Turn to the Book of Job, chapter 27, verses 8 through 10. What is the hope of the hypocrite? He does have a hope because in Job we read: ***"For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?"*** Here is a question that is asked. Will a hypocrite delight himself in God? Will he? He may delight himself in God's ordinances, in the Bible and in prayer, but as far as delighting in God Himself, notice the question is, will he always call upon God? Put that in the back of your mind and we are going to bring it up again in just a minute. Will the hypocrite always call upon God?

Now lets go to the New Testament to the Book of Matthew chapter 16. Here our Lord is going to be dealing with the formalistic religion of His day. Remember, this is not a religion that has departed as such from holding to the Bible. The Pharisees were the conservatives, they were the fundamentalists so to speak. They believed the Bible. The Sadducees were the liberals who didn't believe in the resurrection. Notice, it was from this group that our Lord encountered opposition. Whatever Jesus was teaching was not setting well with the Pharisees and with the Sadducees. Beginning in verse 1 of Matthew chapter 16 - ***"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be***

**fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed."** What kind of religion did the Pharisees have? It was an external formalistic religion, and they went by what they could see with the eye. Jesus took them to issue with this. He said the only sign I am going give you is that of the Prophet Jonas. What was that sign? As Jonas was in the belly of the whale 3 days and 3 nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth 3 days and 3 nights. (See Matthew 12:40). In other words, He was saying the only sign I am going to give you is the gospel itself. Now you can discern the signs in the skies, but you are missing Me, the Lord of the gospel. Now look at how this affected them in verse 6 - **"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."** He said to "beware" of them. The disciples didn't understand what He was talking about. They thought He was talking about some literal bread, so He explained it to them. In verse 12, **"Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."** Wouldn't it be interesting to know what the Pharisees and the Sadducees taught their converts.

Lets go to the Book of Luke, chapter 12, and we will have this same passage expounded by Jesus Himself starting in verse 1. **"In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."** What is hypocrisy? Lets look on in verse 2 - **"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."** What is a hypocrite? Jesus described them. He said **"beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees."** He said the Pharisees had an external religion but internally they had impure hearts which had no cleansing from God. That is hypocrisy. It is hypocritical just to be externally clean and spotless, but internally desiring the very things which they externally refrained from doing.

I have made a little observation, and it breaks my heart every time I see this happen. But ever so often we hear of ministers who deny the faith, wreck their marriage and run off with another woman. They bring shame to the cause of Christ and the church. When that

happens, that is something no one should take pride in. That should be pitied and should be a warning to all of us. But there is something I have observed. I know two or three men like this, and one of the strongest things they were noted for in their ministry was that they could hardly get through a sermon without preaching on the subject of adultery. I have heard these men stand and give warning for men to stay away from women who were not their wives. It seemed like they could not get through a message without having this subject being brought up. Eventually it is revealed that they succumbed to that very sin. What was the problem? Here was an individual who was giving an external warning, but all the time, was internally desiring that very thing he was warning against. Do you see what a hypocrite can be? A hypocrite can be right externally, but having an internal desire for that which he says he is opposed to. Jesus said, "beware of this. It is leaven." What does leaven do? When you make bread, you put leaven in it, what does it do? Does it stay like that? It begins to expand and enlarge. Beloved, as the Pilgrim is making progress toward heaven, the Pharisee will make progress toward his sin. What is eventually in the heart is going to increase until finally it comes out.

In Isaiah 33:14, it says that the hypocrite shall be surprised in the day of judgment. Fear shall suddenly come upon him which tells us that the hypocrite is a person who has a lot of assurance that everything is alright in his life. Go to the Book of Philippians chapter 3, and listen to Paul as he describes himself prior to the Holy Spirit revealing Christ to him. He said, "I was a Pharisee of the Pharisees touching the law I was blameless." You couldn't have convinced him that he wasn't a saved person. Paul says, here is what I thought I was until God showed me what I really was.

I want to pass on to this searching conclusion. How can you determine whether you and I are hypocrites or not? How can we determine that? All of us would probably say that we have assurance that we are saved. What is the basis of our assurance? How do you know that the devil hasn't given you that assurance? How do you know if you are no different than the Pharisees? There are two infallible tests, and we are going to examine them tonight. These tests will never fail. I can't search your heart, but the Holy Spirit can take these tests, and He will search the heart to determine whether or not you are a

How much time and what is the nature of your prayer life when you are all alone and there is no one else there to see or hear you?

self-deceived hypocrite. The first test is true prayer. I am not talking about praying in public. The Pharisee could get up and pray the most beautiful prayers in public, and people could say, "Oh, what a devout person he is!" I am talking about true prayer. How much time do you spend in prayer, and what is the nature of your prayer life when you are all alone and there is no one else there to see or hear you? That is when the hypocrite will no longer pray, when there is nobody there to watch him. When there are no news reporters there to record what he is saying, and to put it in the paper so he could be known for his religiosity. If I went to the chair by your bedside, if that chair could talk, how much could that chair tell me about your prayer life? How much could your automobile tell me of your prayer life when you are driving down the road? When you are out walking through the fields, how many crows could tell me about your prayer life? You see beloved, this is heart religion. What you are in my presence is one thing, but what you are when you are all by yourself, is what you really are. This takes the mask off of hypocrisy, because there is nothing for a hypocrite to gain when it is just between he and God. Can you open up your heart in prayer when your wife and children are not there, when your pastor is not there? When no one is there, just you alone, do you pray to God and tell Him what you are and ask Him to help you live the kind of life you would like to live? That is the mark of a true convert. But ladies and gentlemen, I would warn you, by the authority given to me as a minister of the gospel, in which the writer of Hebrews says, **"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls,"** (Hebrews 13:17), if you never pray, I fear for your very salvation. I'm not talking about being called on to pray in public. But if the only time you pray is when there is going to be some gain coming back, I fear that you are a Pharisee who has become guilty of self-deception in the heart.

Now I said there were two tests, so then there is another test, and these are always found in every person. The first one that will take the mask off of a hypocrite is their true prayer life, and the second one is their opinion of themselves. Notice I didn't say what the preacher thinks about them. I didn't say what their wife thinks about them, but only what you think of yourself. I don't know what you think of yourself, only you do. But what do you think of yourself? Let me give you an example that Jesus gives of two people. One was a regenerate person and the other was a non-regenerate person. One was a Christian and one was a non-Christian. Jesus said there were two people who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Publican and the other was a Pharisee. Lets look at their opinions of themselves as they prayed. The Pharisee stood with himself and said, **"God, I thank thee, that I am not**

***as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.***" (Luke 18:11). What was his opinion? He thought very highly of himself. Now the Publican wouldn't even go up to the door, but he cried out ***"God, be merciful to me a sinner."*** (Luke 18:13). What was his opinion of himself? He was a person that knew he was nobody, he had nothing, he could do nothing, he was nothing, and he stood before God in need of all things. But the Pharisee stood with a very high opinion of himself. Now I ask you tonight, young people, adults, mothers and dads, what do you think of yourself when you stand before God? What is your opinion of yourself? What is it? Listen to Paul before his conversion. He said, "I was blameless," but listen to him after he was converted. He said "I am the chief of sinners." Listen to him as he cries out in the 7th chapter of Romans, ***"Oh wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"*** What does that tell us? Simply this, that the more holy a person becomes, the more he despises the remaining sin that is within him. Paul would close, ***"I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord."*** What is your opinion of yourself? What is your opinion of Jesus? If your opinion is high, and you think that you have something to boast of before God, I fear that it may be an external mark of a self-deceived religion. It would be my prayer as your pastor that when you get by yourself and pray, you can pray like Charles Spurgeon who would say, *"Oh, Lord, when I say I love you Jesus, I want you to be able to say back to me, "I know you do, Charles, I know you do."* Do you want to pray like that? No show to be made, just before God in love to Him. And when you stand before your Lord, are you there as Mary Magdalene to wipe His feet with her hair, or are you there boasting about what you are doing for His great work. Your prayer life and your opinion of yourself when you are by yourself will reveal whether you are a hypocrite or whether you are a true Christian. Those two always go together - prayer and self opinion. The closer that a person walks with God, the lower opinion they are going to have of their flesh, and a higher opinion they are going to have of their need of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Pride in the flesh, and Christianity do not belong in the same body. God help us to search our hearts tonight. Shall we pray?

Father in heaven we pray this evening that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit of God might open our eyes and help us to see just what we truly are. And Father help us not to make a show. Help us not to just have an external form of religion that we go through with, but help us to have a heart religion that desires the will of our Lord. We thank you Jesus for working in our lives and for bringing us out of a formal religion, out of a hypocritical religion in which we felt our betterment above other men, and we thank you for the work of grace which

enables us to say truly from the heart, "we are what we are by your grace and nothing more."  
We are sinners, in fact the chief of sinners. What other people know about us, we know far more about us and we don't try to hide it from Thee, but we would ask for more grace to come and sanctify our lives that we might be more like the Master, for we ask it in His lovely Name, Amen.