

PLAYING CHURCH
PART 1–THE LOST HYPOCRITE
MATTHEW 7:21-23

INTRODUCTION

Most of you know that I grew up in Church. I thank God for that. I was blessed with parents who cared enough for me to raise me up in the things of God—both at home and in Church.

Now understand that my parents weren't perfect. Neither am I and neither are you. There were areas where they failed. Each of us, if we're honest, have to admit we fail in certain areas of our lives at times. Nevertheless, my parents were faithful to God and willing to allow God to work on the areas in their lives that needed working on. I believe that has a lot to do with what and where I am today.

I am not a Christian because I grew up in Church or because my parents were Christians. I am a Christian because I came to a point in my life where I saw myself as God saw me, that is, as a lost sinner headed for a devil's hell. I was utterly hopeless to do anything to save myself. I saw what Jesus did for me at Calvary and I came to an understanding that only through faith in His gospel could I be saved.

His death was for my sins, His burial, and resurrection—all of that was for me. I trusted Him alone for my salvation and was gloriously saved on February 17, 1971 (So I've been saved now for 43 years and 7 months)

I could just as easily be out of Church today. Many who were in similar circumstances such as mine are out of Church today. Their lives are in ruins.

It would have been easy for me to look at and blame my parents for not being all that they should be.

I could have looked at Church people who weren't what they should be (many were inconsistent and had a poor testimony)

I could have even looked at some preacher that wasn't all that he should be for a reason to quit on God.

I could just have easily used my early childhood experiences as a reason not to believe and go live my own life after the flesh and its desires.

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I know people who at one time were faithful to God who have quit on God.

I know people who used to outwardly walk with God who turned and began to walk in ways that were displeasing to the Lord.

I grew up seeing many people in the Church who were hypocrites. To some of them, I believed it may have been real at one time. They just got their focus off of Christ and on to something else.

To others, though, it was never real to them—it was all a show! They were hypocrites.

Understand that a hypocrite is a play actor. Hypocrites play a part that is not real to them. When you watch television or movies you are watching a bunch of hypocrites most of the time. The life of the television and movie star is far different from what they portray on the screen. They are play actors. They are hypocrites, if you will. They play a part that is not real in their life. They portray another person's life. Sadly, many people in Church do the same thing. They play as if they are Christians and they are not. They have a head knowledge of God and Christ. They give lip service and call themselves Christians. Nevertheless, their hearts are far from God.

On the other hand there are Christians who at one time walked with God. They no longer walk with Him closely, but follow Him afar off. Their testimony is in shambles. And because they have drifted, their life is also in shambles!

People will tolerate hypocrites in every area of their lives pretty much, except in Church. People can sit in a sports stadium and cheer their team on when all around them are hypocrites. There are actually people sitting around them who are not true fans of their team.

Some are fans as long as the team is winning. However, you let the team begin to lose and things get different. They don't support the team anymore. They stay home. They bad mouth the team and its leaders.

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Those folks are pretending to be fans of the team, they aren't really fans of the team!

Even some of the key players are hypocrites. They lead people to believe they are team members. However, when they get to the end of their contract they declare free agency and move to another team chasing after more money, then you find out their true colors.

They were hypocrites! Nevertheless, this is your team and you keep supporting it. You keep cheering them on. You keep looking for a reason to believe in them because deep down you are a true fan.

You see what I'm saying. People will tolerate hypocrites in every area of their lives pretty much except in Church. I believe the reason for that is because some people are **looking for a reason not to believe**.

We should be looking at Jesus and not at people! People can and will let us down. But, Jesus never fails! If we are looking for someone's faults we will find them. I have them. You have them. Everybody has them. Just because I'm saved doesn't mean that I'm perfect. I still fall short of the glory of God each and every day.

We should be looking for a reason to believe. But that's not usually the way it is for a lot of people. They see a hypocrite or they see a backslidden Church member and they use that as an excuse for not being in church and not trusting the Lord or for not being faithful themselves.

If you look for a reason to not believe, you'll find it. If you look for a reason to drop out of church, you'll find it. If you look for a reason to believe and be faithful to God, you'll find that too. **What are you looking for?** Did you come to church with a chip on your shoulder this morning? If you did, somebody will probably knock it off before you leave today.

There was a long period of time in my life—almost 15 years—when I was lost. God was so long suffering with me. I didn't deserve that.

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As a young child my older brother, Ronnie (who is also a preacher and I would "*Play Church*" while our parents cleaned the Church.

Sometimes Ronnie would lead the singing and I would preach. Sometimes we reversed the roles. The fact was that it was just a show. We were imitating what we saw happening at Church. Both of us were little sinners who were lost and in need of a Saviour. I'm afraid there are some people in Church today who don't have anything real. They just imitate those that are around them and hope its somehow good enough to get them to heaven. It is **not** good enough!

As I grew older God began to deal with my heart about my sin. I walked the aisle of the Church and made a "*Profession of Faith*" at the age of 7. I didn't truly get born again because I didn't understand how to be saved. The preaching of a Revival preacher got me lost, but I didn't get saved because I had a pastor at that time who did not see that I got personally dealt with from the Scripture. I was just baptized and added to the membership roles of the Church. Nevertheless, I was lost as a goose.

For the next seven to eight years I played Church still. I played the part well. I was the Sunday School teachers' favorite. I was a "good" boy. I memorized the verses. I studied the lessons. I sang the songs. I sat under the preaching. I knew all the right answers. I could even tell you the Romans Road to Salvation. I had a good head knowledge of the things of God. However, I was lost! Jesus was someone that I knew a lot about but I didn't know Him personally—there was no relationship! There is a difference!

What am I saying? The Scripture here is clear that there are many folks who are going to be surprised at where they wind up one day. They are going to expect to be going to heaven. But, they will wind up in the Lake of Fire. Why? Because what they had wasn't real!

I know this has been a long introduction. Please bear with me for just a little bit. I'll try not to be long, but this is important. I want to speak to you on this matter of "*Playing Church*."

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Today we will look at it from the perspective of the lost hypocrite. Next week, Lord willing we will look at it from the perspective of the backslidden Christian.

I. PLAYING CHURCH IS DECEPTIVE!

Playing church is deceptive in this respect:

The lost man who plays church **says with his lips what is not a reality in his heart.**

1 Samuel 16:7– “. . . for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

A. Playing Church Can Deceive The Observant!

1 Samuel 16:7–“man looketh on the outward appearance”

We are all observant of others that we come into contact with. But, none of us can see inside a man’s heart. Therefore, it is possible for any of us to be deceived into believing that someone is following the Lord when, in reality, the opposite is true.

Did you know that Judas Iscariot deceived the other 11 disciples. They were shocked to find out that Judas had been a part of them without really being a part of them. Judas was playing church!

2 Corinthians 11:3-4; 13-15 speaks of the deceptive abilities of Satan and his followers.

1. **Families Can Be Deceived.**
2. **Friends Can Be Deceived.**
3. **Foes Can Be Deceived.**

B. Playing Church Can Deceive The Participant!
(Matthew 7:22)

1 Samuel 16:7–“ man looketh on the outward appearance”
Understand that the Bible says that it is possible to be self-deceived.

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1. *Jeremiah 17:9–“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*
2. *Proverbs 28:26–“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.”*
3. *Proverbs 16:25–“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*

I’m afraid that there are many people who are in Church walking after their own idea of what it takes to be saved, but they really don’t have a clue that they are walking in a path leading them straight into the flames of hell!

Their way **seems right**, but it is as wrong as wrong can be!

I talk with people all the time that don’t see the difference between believing in your head and believing in your heart. They just don’t get it!

Satan has them deceived into believing that just because they believe in their minds that Jesus died for their sins, was buried, and rose again the third day that they have the Bible equivalent of Salvation. That just ain’t so! Romans 10:9-10.

Playing Church Can Deceive The Observant...Participant...

C. Playing Church Cannot Deceive The Omniscient!

1 Samuel 16:7-- “. . . for the LORD seeth not as man seeth. . . but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

Jeremiah 17:10– “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

2 Timothy 2:19– “The Lord knoweth them that are His.”

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Look at what God says in our text in Matthew 7:23 again.
Jesus will profess unto them, “*I never knew you!*”

Some try to use this passage as a proof text that people can lose their Salvation. This is not speaking about somebody that had Salvation and lost it! Note what He said! He said “*I never knew you!*”

You may say, but what about all of the good things these people did that are listed in verse 22.

Isaiah 64:6–“But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”

Quite simply, it was their good works. It was not Christ working through them. Look at verse 23. Their works were said to be “*iniquity.*”

You may be pulling one off on your family, friends, and neighbors. You may be even deceiving yourself. But you cannot deceive God! God knows if what you have is real or not!

PLAYING CHURCH IS DECEPTIVE...

II. PLAYING CHURCH IS DISOBEDIENCE! (Matthew 7:21-22)

What is disobedience? When someone in authority either tells us to do or not do something and we don't do what they tell us to do or we do what they tell us not to do– that is disobedience! Is there anyone here who doesn't understand that concept?

God did not tell us to play Church!

We are not told to just call out to the Lord and everything will be alright.

(Read Romans 10:13 in context with the verses that follow–faith must precede it!)

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We are not told to attend Church and everything will be alright!

We are not told to get baptized and/or become a Church member and everything will be alright!

We are not told to try and live like those who are in Church and things will be alright!

We are not told to preach the Bible to others in the name of Jesus and things will be alright! I did that in Children's church when I was but a teenager without ever knowing the Lord myself!

We are not told to do good things and do them in Jesus name and things will be alright!

Titus 3:5–“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

Ephesians 2:8-9–“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

We are told to do the will of God the Father which is in heaven.

What is the Father's will concerning this matter of Salvation?

Jesus told us himself in *John 6:40– “And this is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Have you done that? If not you are in disobedience!

Romans 10:9-10 describes that belief as a believing with the heart!

To play Church and not be born again is disobedience!

PLAYING CHURCH IS DECEPTIVE, PLAYING CHURCH IS DISOBEDIENCE:

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III. PLAYING CHURCH IS DUMB!

I want to be kind, I really do. But, playing Church is one of the dumbest things you can do!

You go to all of the trouble to live an outward life that winds up being a lie. You attend church, you play a part, you die and wind up in hell! That ain't real bright!

You hear good gospel preaching and teaching week after week and let it go in one ear and out the other. You sit here wasting your time thinking things are OK when if you just did a little self examination you would know things aren't right!

Paul told the Corinthians in *2 Corinthians 13:5*–“*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*”

Examine yourselves today! Are you in the faith?

If not, why not smarten up and get something real that will really do you some good! Get saved today! Get real genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ today!

God the Father has done all He can do to bring us Salvation!
He sent the Son!

God the Son has done all He can do to bring us Salvation!
He gave His life for our sin–He is our Sacrifice!

God the Spirit Is doing all He can do to bring us Salvation!
He is the one who draws us with the Word of God and convicts our wicked hearts of our sin of unbelief and shows us that Jesus is the only Way to Salvation!

How dumb can a person be when they continue to resist all that God has done for them?! Hey look, I've been there!

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I lived for a full year **knowing** if I drew my last breath I would die and go to hell. I did that because of pride. Dumb pride! Dumb pride will send your soul to hell!

PLAYING CHURCH IS DECEPTIVE, PLAYING CHURCH IS DISOBEDIENCE, PLAYING CHURCH IS DUMB:

IV. PLAYING CHURCH IS DEADLY! (Matthew 7:23)

I'm speaking of more than just physical death here.

Hebrews 9:27–“*. . . it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*”

Those who play church all their life will wind up at the Great White Throne Judgment hearing those awful words. “*I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity.*”

That, my friend, is the second death of *Revelation 20:14-15*– “*And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*”

Conclusion

Think of it. Separated from God for all eternity. Is that what you really want? No one in their right mind would want that! Are you saved today? Really examine yourself.

Why don't you come to Jesus and trade your play for something real and lasting.

What about you Christian friend. Are you busy telling others about the Lord or are you just assuming folks that are attending church somewhere have a relationship with the Lord?

We need to examine ourselves! We need to get others to examine themselves!