

HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy

Taught at our Sunday morning service, 26th June 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Job 27:8-12 (Job speaking in response to his friend, Bildad)

For what is the hope of the hypocrite, Though he may gain much, If God takes away his life? Will God hear his cry When trouble comes upon him? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call on God? "I will teach you about the hand of God; What is with the Almighty I will not conceal. Surely all of you have seen it; Why then do you behave with complete nonsense?"

Good morning!

Once after Charles Spurgeon preached, an older lady came up to him and said "what you said wounded me". "My dear lady" Spurgeon replied "I didn't mean to wound you, I meant to kill you".

His intent wasn't to cause offence, but to preach the Bible so faithfully that it may convict, correct and change a person so that they may truly give their whole selves to Christ.

I share that this morning, as we're going to look at a the topic of hypocrisy, and it's a topic that, if we're not careful, we'll end up taking offence at each other on, rather than letting God's Word have its way in us. So let's pray that I may teach faithfully, and that we we may all apply it correctly, and where needed, with urgency.

Let's pray.

Introduction:

Are you a hypocrite? Are you? Do you say one thing, and do another? I ask you this, with special regard to what you believe. And what you say about what you believe. And what you sing about it.

Recently I read a comment, perhaps an observation that "Christians like talking about hypocrisy as much as turkeys like talking about thanksgiving" - or in British English, Christmas.

I wonder, how true that is? Regardless of the answer, a few things *are* certain:

1. Any amount of hypocrisy in the church, or in our lives, is a problem
2. Hypocrisy IS a problem in the church at large today
3. The Bible, indeed Jesus, was and is not silent on the topic

So then, is hypocrisy a problem in *this* church? Well, that depends squarely on whether it is a problem in you. And the person sat next to you. And me. And all of us.

Let's consider for a moment, some of the impact hypocrisy has. TobyMac, singer in the Christian band DC Talk, once said:

The number one cause of Atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, and walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what the unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.

Toby Mac, DC Talk - Jesus Freak album (1995)

That's a sobering thought, right? That praising God on a Sunday, looking good in front of other Christians, and then living like the world on Monday, actually pushes our unbelieving friends, colleagues, even family, or our children, away from Christ.

Jesus warned vigorously against such in Matthew 23, with the whole chapter focussed on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And in verses 25-28 he said:

Matthew 23:25-28

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

This is terrible, right? I mean, you can't believe anyone would be like this. That they would put on a good show, yet inside be dishonouring to God. That they would gather to their place of worship *appearing* holy to others, yet away from it live unholy lives. Yet, are we like this?

Over the past month or two, it's really struck me how grand the claims are that we make when we sing our praise & worship to God on a Sunday. Not that it's a bad thing to sing these words. But when we do, and then live contrary to them, we're being hypocritical.

So let's take a look at some of those words. In the song, *Goodness of God* we sing:

Goodness of God:

With every breath that I am able

Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

Hands up if you recall singing that those words... OK then; have you done what you said you would do? With every breath that you are able? In light of that, let's consider what we read in Acts 5...

Acts 5:1-11

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

We need to be consistent between our words and our actions. If we're promising God our *all*, we should be giving our all - if we don't, we're acting like Ananias & Sapphira with our time and energies - saying we're giving all, when in fact we're giving part. Elsewhere in that song we sing:

Goodness of God:

With my life laid down
I'm surrendered now
I give You everything
'Cause Your goodness is running after
It's running after me

Quite the statement. Only a committed Christian would sing those words, right? Well, not so. Jesus warned that there would be those who go through the motions, those that say many things with their lips, yet have unchanged hearts:

Matthew 7:21-23

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Oh, may that not be any of us. And may none of us sing these words lightly. Indeed, this is far from the only song where we make such big claims. In the song *Worth it all* we sing:

Worth it all:

I let go of all I have
Just to have all of You
And no matter what the cost
I will follow You

Do we mean that. Really? Are we *really* prepared to give all we have? At any cost? Consider what we read in Luke chapter 14:

Luke 14:25-33

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

Have you let go of all you have? Do you follow Jesus no matter the cost? Or are those just words you sing on a Sunday? We're not wrong to sing these words - we just read Jesus' words that if you don't forsake all you have, you cannot be His disciple. But do you? Do you forsake all you have?

Let me ask you this... What comes first in your life? Your hobbies? Family time? Career? Sports? Entertainment? or church?

Let me be clear - it's important to have a right perspective. I know that responsibility to my church family does not negate my marital or family responsibility. That is, for example, while God may raise up who He wills to teach and pastor this church, I am the only one who is Siân's husband, and Judah's dad - and I must take those responsibilities seriously first. But to think there is no *moment* where I should choose serving in ministry or attending church meetings over time with my wife or son, is not only foolish, it's unbiblical. Just as it's unbiblical to always prioritise play time over prayer time in the home, and to always put movie night, date night, or an early night ahead of reading my Bible. It's exactly that sort of sacrifice that Jesus spoke of in that passage we just read.

Let me put it another way, to put Sian and Judah first, I need to be the godly man I should be. And that means being an example in forsaking all. If I'm always present at home, but don't make it out to church services - what good is that? Or if in the future I make it a habit to take Judah to football once a month on a Sunday morning, what example is that setting to him? If I take Siân out to dinner, and go on walks with her, but never read my Bible as to how I should treat her, or spend time praying for her and with her - I'm seriously lacking as a husband. In order to be a good husband, and good dad, I need to be a good Christian. I need to forsake some things. And so do you.

Simply put, if you are invited somewhere else on a Sunday morning, you can't make it. Whether that's to a BBQ, a family gathering, a children's party, or whatever. Being here is part of forsaking all.

Now, I know life is busy - some of that is choice - but it is busy. And I'm still learning the demands of family life. But whether you have children or not, are married or not, and whether you work or are retired, or are studying, or are at school, you have a choice. And while we can all list reasons we didn't make it to a specific home-group meeting, prayer meeting, men's prayer breakfast, or women's conference, to have *never* made it to one - ever, or for years, is ultimately to make excuses why we're not forsaking all.

Likewise, when we regularly prioritise checking Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or the news, or catching up on our favourite TV shows and such over reading our Bible or praying, we're not forsaking all.

Perhaps you think I'm being harsh. I'm not. And I know I'm not because I've heard you sing these words...

Always forever:

I would lay down my life

Just to be by Your side

You are my love my life always forever

Should we sing different songs? No. Rather, we should be consistent with what we sing. Look at what we read in Mark chapter 8:

Mark 8:34-38

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Are you busy trying to gain the whole world? Or are you one of those radical Christians that means what they sing? Consider this next song...

Arms of love

My heart is glad that You've called me Your own.

There's no place I'd rather be than

In Your arms of love, In Your arms of love.

Great words! And it reminds me of what David wrote in Psalm 27:

Psalm 27:4

One thing I have desired of the LORD,

That will I seek:

That I may dwell in the house of the LORD

All the days of my life,

To behold the beauty of the LORD,

And to inquire in His temple.

What do you love? What do you desire? Are you going to be like David, or like Demas, of whom we read:

2 Timothy 4:9-10a

Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...

How sad that Demas, who Paul had noted among those sending greetings to the Colossians and Philemon, had walked away - loving the things of the world, rather than the things of God.

So how much do you desire the things of God? How much do you desire *Him* and time with Him?

I do worry about how little we pray together as a church. I certainly hope that we pray in our homes - individually, as couples, and as families. But our church prayer meeting typically has around just 5 people there, yet on a Sunday we sing:

Battle belongs

So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees
With my hands lifted high
Oh God, the battle belongs to You

I'm not sure how battle ready we are. AW Tozer wrote this:

We expect to enter the everlasting kingdom of our Father and to sit down around the table with sages, saints and martyrs; and through the grace of God, maybe we shall; yes, maybe we shall. But for the most of us it could prove at first an embarrassing experience. Ours might be the silence of the untried soldier in the presence of the battle-hardened heroes who have fought the fight and won the victory and who have scars to prove that they were present when the battle was joined.

AW Tozer

Now, it could be argued that some of the newer songs around today tend to focus more on us than God, on *our* promises and *our* hearts, rather than *God's* promises and *His* heart - and I think that's true to some extent, and that's not an entirely helpful thing. But we make equally great claims in the older hymns we sing too, such as *Be Thou my vision*:

Be Thou my vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

Is our best thought of the day, God? Or are we rather consumed by the things of this world? We read this warning in 1st John:

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

When our best thought really is God, the rest of the song makes sense:

Be Thou my vision

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always

When Jesus Himself is what we are most looking forward to in our lives, then everything else takes its rightful place, and our priorities get straightened out.

The challenging songs don't stop there, however. For we also sing the words:

Holy holy holy

Holy, holy, holy
Lord God almighty
Early in the morning my song shall rise to thee

For any of you that enjoy sleep, and I know I do, this one hurts a bit. Now, I'm not saying if you medically or physically need your rest, that you should deny yourself of it - but rather, I think we should consider how we start our days, and whether we should make more of an effort to read our Bibles and pray before we do anything - especially if we sing the words to this song!

In another song we sing often, we declare:

I have decided

I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.

This is a big statement, especially when we consider it in the light of Luke chapter 9 where we read:

Luke 9:59-62

Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Do we look back at our old lives and long for them? Do we yearn for drunken nights out on the town, casual sex or drugs?

Next, consider the words to another couple of songs:

Lay me down

Letting go of my pride
Giving up all my rights
Take this life and let it shine, shine, shine
Take this life and let it shine
I lay me down I'm not my own
I belong to You alone

And also these words:

Surrender

I'm giving you my heart, and all this is within
I lay it all down, for the sake of you my king
I'm giving you my dreams, Laying down my rights
Giving up my pride, for the promise of new life
And I surrender, all to you
All to you

This is huge. Giving up all the *rights* that the world says we have, and giving our whole selves to Jesus, for His purpose and His glory. Do we? Are we really prepared to give up what the world says are our rights? Do we really lay everything down before God and say "have Your way"? Do we really say "not my will, but Thy will be done"?

If we do, we shouldn't expect unbelievers to understand it. We read in 1 Peter:

1 Peter 4:1-4

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

Again the purpose of looking at these songs is to consider whether we sing one thing, and do another - for if we do, we're being hypocritical. Our response? Not that we would stop singing the songs, but that our hearts may be changed. For our praise and worship *should* be in response to who God is, what God has done for us, what He is doing in us, and what He has promised to us.

Here's a few more songs to consider. We sing:

Make room

And I will make room for You
To do whatever You want to

Do we? Or are we so set on our plans, that we don't really want God to change anything? Consider what we read in James chapter 4:

James 4:13-16

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Are we really happy for God to have His way, rather than us have our way? And when things don't go according to our plan, do we grumble, or do we still praise God? For we sing these words often...

Blessed be the name

Every blessing You pour out, I'll
Turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord

We'd do well to think of the following verses in James when we sing those words:

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Are you feeling challenged by this? I am - and have been as I've been thinking on this over the past few weeks. Am I living up to the bold claims I'm making when I sing? Are you? If we're not, then what kind of witness is that to those around us? What kind of example is it to each other? Not a good one in either case. But we can't let conviction bother us *this* morning, and mean nothing tomorrow morning. So what do we do?

What I really hope, is that if you feel convicted, that you don't feel dejected, thinking you're the only one who struggles to live as a godly man or woman. Because you're not the only person in this church that struggles. I doubt you're the only person in your row. And the Bible is filled with characters who struggled in so many ways - one of which we're right in the middle of looking at in our study through John's gospel, and that's Peter.

This was a man who followed Jesus for 3 years, sat under His ministry, saw His miracles first hand, and heard His teaching, and then was so zealous that he cut off the soldier's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane. But then what? He denies Jesus 3 times before morning breaks.

And maybe we can relate to that - we can be zealous in our praise to God on a Sunday, then deny Him in our classroom, lecture hall or workplace the following morning. But as we'll see in our studies, Jesus wasn't finished with Peter. And He's not finished with you either.

Of course, we know that following the events in Gethsemane came Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and then Pentecost. And you might think it was plain sailing for Peter from there. After all, he was the one who delivered the first sermon after Pentecost, leading thousands to Christ in one day. Yet, we read in Galatians that later on, Paul (who was a younger Christian) had called Peter out for being a hypocrite, and causing others to be hypocritical when certain Jews came to Antioch. More worried about what they thought than what God thought, and living differently when they were around.

So once again, Peter was a hypocrite - but, and this is important, he didn't persist in his hypocrisy. Indeed, this was a man so committed to the cause of Christ that it cost him his life. Indeed it's believed he requested to be crucified upside down because he didn't think himself worthy to be killed in the same manner as Jesus.

This brings us to the key question this morning. Are you a hypocrite? Are you?

If this morning you have realised that you're singing things that you're not doing, or even living quite contrary to - then what are you going to do about it? The answer is not to hope things get better - you need to actively do something about it. Starting with your relationship with the Lord. Dust off your Bibles, read them, obey them. And spend time in prayer. And I suggest you ask the Lord what He would have you do. Spurgeon once said, the very motto of a Christian should be "I serve". So ask the Lord how and where He wants you to do that.

And then, heed the call we read in Hebrews chapter 10:

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Drawing to a close, I want to note an observation from an old preacher called Smith Wigglesworth, which should challenge us to consider if what unbelievers see in us is a hypocrite who says, sings and believes one thing yet lives contrary to that. Or whether what they see is Jesus living in and through us. Smith Wigglesworth said:

The reason the world is not seeing Jesus is that Christian people are not filled with Jesus. They are satisfied with attending meetings weekly, reading the Bible occasionally, and praying sometimes. It is an awful thing for me to see people who profess to be Christians lifeless, powerless, and in a place where their lives are so parallel to unbelievers' lives that it is difficult to tell which place they are in, whether in the flesh or in the Spirit.

Smith Wigglesworth

What do we do? Peter writes:

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Laying aside hypocrisy. As well as deceit, malice and all evil speaking. And then, desiring our spiritual food. You know, it's possible that Judah shares my love of food. But wow, and I'm sure those of you who have cared for newborns can appreciate, when it comes to feeding time he is desperate for milk. I mean, if we don't get the bottle there in time, especially after he's seen it, there can be tears! And that's the hunger and enthusiasm we should have for God's Word.

Conclusion

Friends, let me be direct - it's time we stopped being hypocrites by singing great words, making big promises, statements or claims, but not following through on those things in our lives.

Let's turn our eyes upon Jesus, that the things of this world may become strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Application questions

Because it can be helpful to ask ourselves questions, here's a few application questions to help us pause and think on during this week:

- How well does your life match with what you sing?
- Would it be a surprise to your school-friends or colleagues if they heard you sing the words to the songs you do on a Sunday, given what they see during the week?
- What are you going to do to avoid being a hypocrite?

Let's pray.