

THE SIN OF THE CHURCH

YOU MAY BE WONDERING SINCE YOU SAT DOWN AND LOOKED AT THE BULLETIN AND SAW THE TITLE OF THE MESSAGE "WHAT IS THEE SIN OF THE CHURCH?" **WHAT IS THE SIN THAT HAS DRIVEN MANY PEOPLE, YOUNG AND OLD, AWAY? WHAT SIN HAS CAUSED MANY A CHURCH MEMBER TO SELF-DESTRUCT? IT IS "HYPOCRISY",** MEANING, *"the behavior of people who do things that they tell other people not to do. It is behavior that does not agree with what someone claims to believe or feel."*

JESUS USED THE WORD "HYPOCRITE" OR "HYPOCRISY" NEARLY TWENTY TIMES THROUGHOUT THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE. IT FIRST APPEARED IN MATTHEW 6:2 AS A WARNING WHEN GIVING ALMS AND NOT SOUNDING A TRUMPET WHEN YOU DO IT, THAT WAS BEING A HYPOCRITE. HE WENT ON TO WARN US ABOUT HYPOCRISY WHEN PRAYING AND DRAWING ATTENTION TO OURSELVES. JESUS CALLED OUT THE PHARISEES A NUMBER OF TIMES BECAUSE OF IT. JESUS EVEN WARNED HIS DISCIPLES TO WATCH OUT FOR IT IN THEIR LIVES. JESUS KNEW THE DEVASTATING AND LONG-LASTING EFFECT HYPOCRISY COULD HAVE.

NOW BEFORE I GO ANY FURTHER, WE ARE TO REMEMBER ONE THING. **JESUS IS NOT SAYING HERE THAT THE DANGER IS NOT IN FAILING, WE ALL FAIL, BUT IN HYPOCRISY.** WE DO NOT HAVE TO PRETEND WE ARE BETTER THAN SOMEONE ELSE. **WE ARE LOVED AND FORGIVEN BY GOD BECAUSE OF JESUS GOING TO THE CROSS.** WHEN WE THINK ABOUT IT, THERE A NUMBER OF VERSES SPEAKING TO THIS SUBJECT. WE TALK OF NOT THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF ONESELF, BUT NOT TO GET DOWN ON OURSELVES EITHER. IN ROMANS 12:3 *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you."* AND IN ROMANS 3:23 *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."*

ALL THROUGH THE BIBLE WE ARE MADE AWARE OF OUR SIN, BUT WE ARE ALSO REMINDED OF THE LOVE AND GRACE OF GOD. LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT AS PHILIPPIANS 4:3 "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is near." **TOO MANY TIMES THE CHURCH HAS SPOKEN ONLY OF THE LOVE OF GOD AND LEFT OUT THE SUBJECT OF SIN.** HOW CAN WE DO THAT, AFTER ALL SIN IS THE REASON JESUS WENT TO THE CROSS? IT REALLY IS BEING HYPOCRITICAL TO SPEAK OF ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER! WE CAN NOT GO AROUND CONSTANTLY SPEAKING ONE WAY AND ACTING ANOTHER – THAT IS HYPOCRISY!!!

THERE IS A STORY THAT SAYS IT ALL. Two young people were going on their first date. He arrives at the girl's house with a BMW to pick her up. He is dressed in a three-piece suit. To impress her he takes her to the best restaurant in town. She is dressed in understated elegance and has a new hairdo. It is a perfect evening. Facts are, he borrowed the car and the suit and spent a week's wages on dinner. She on the other hand spent a fortune to have her hair done and facial.

IF THIS RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPS INTO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL BOTH WILL HAVE TO "UNMASK" AND BE WHO THEY REALLY ARE. THE SAME APPLIES TO US AND OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST. HOWEVER, UNLIKE THE RELATIONSHIP I JUST SPOKE OF, IN OUR RELATIONSHIP ONE SIDE KNOWS US ALREADY, THOROUGHLY. IN VERSE 2, IT TELLS US IN SO MANY WORDS THAT NOTHING IS HIDDEN AND

EVENTUALLY WILL COME INTO THE LIGHT. OH, I IMAGINE MANY OF US HAVE LEARNED THAT LESSON MORE THAN ONCE! When i first knew Margaret she had a friend that let's say" i did not think much of". Well, I responded back an email to Margaret, only trouble was the friend's email address was on it. And what came to light was what I thought of her by my own hand!!!! **IT IS TRULY AMAZING HOW "THINGS" GET BACK OR COME TO LIGHT.**

JESUS KNEW HOW HYPOCRISY HAD CREPT INTO THE CHURCH OF HIS TIME, AND THE CHURCH WAS THEN ABOUT RULES AND APPEARANCES RATHER THAN THE REAL WORK OF THE CHURCH. FORGOTTEN WAS THE MISSION OF HELPING PEOPLE, BECAUSE THAT MIGHT GET THE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT, THE PHARISEES AND ALL, OUT OF THEIR "COMFORT" ZONE. **MANY OF THE CHURCHES TODAY ARE CONTENT TO SIT AND WATCH THE WORLD GO TO HELL WITHOUT LIFTING A HAND. ONE THING THAT IS CLEAR IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS IS THAT WE ARE TO "GO", SERVE AND TEACH. WE CAN'T DO THAT SITTING BEHIND THESE WALLS!** HOW DO WE EXPECT TO "MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE WORLD"? DO WE EXPECT PEOPLE TO COME TO US, JUST WALK THROUGH OUR DOORS AND SAY "HERE I AM"?

IT IS HYPOCRISY TO NOD OUR HEADS AT THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN AND THEN PASS PEOPLE BY WHO NEED OUR HELP. JESUS FULLY KNEW THE DANGERS, THE PITFALLS AND THE EFFECTS OF HYPOCRISY AND I BELIEVE THAT IS WHY HE WAS SO HARD ON THE PHARISEES AND RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS DAY. OF COURSE WE CANNOT SOLVE A PROBLEM IN OUR LIVES UNLESS WE RECOGNIZE IT EXISTS. **HERE ARE SOME OF THE WAYS WE AS CHURCH PEOPLE CAN BE HYPOCRITICAL.**

JUST LIKE THE PHARISEES WE CAN BECOME "**CHURCHY**" AND JUST BE GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF CHURCH. **RULES AND PROCEDURES CAN BECOME MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PEOPLE** OR WE CAN LOSE SIGHT OF THE MEANING OF IT ALL. WE **MUST** HAVE EVERYTHING SO-SO. IF SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT, IN OUR EYES, ISN'T THE WAY IT SHOULD BE HEAVEN HELP THE PERSON WHO COMMITTED THE INFRACTION!!!

WHAT IS REALLY INTERESTING IS WHENEVER WE HAVE A CHILDREN'S PROGRAM WE CHUCKLE AND SIT BACK ENJOYING THE MISCUES. WHY DO WE EXPECT ADULTS NEVER TO MAKE A MISTAKE, MAYBE "TRIP" OVER A WORD IN THE READING OR HAVE TOO MANY PEOPLE AT THE COMMUNION TABLE? IF WE WERE IN THE SAME POSITION, **WE JUST MIGHT MAKE A MISTAKE AND EXPECT TO BE FORGIVEN FOR IT.** SO IT IS HYPOCRITICAL FOR US TO NOT FORGIVE WHEN WE EXPECT TO BE FORGIVEN.

RELIGION IS NOT ABOUT RULES AND REGULATIONS, IT IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, FIRST WITH JESUS AND THEN WITH PEOPLE! YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY THIS BEFORE BUT THINK OF THIS PICTURE – WHEN WE WORSHIP TOGETHER THERE REALLY IS VERY FEW, IF ANY THING MORE INTIMATE SETTINGS. REMEMBER HAT PERSON NEXT TO YOU OR BEHIND YOU, YOU'RE SPENDING ETERNITY WITH!!!

WE CAN'T BE ALL PIOUS OR CHURCHY ON SUNDAY MORNING AND GO OUT AND LIVE A LIFE JUST THE OPPOSITE. AFTER ALL, IN VERSES TWO IT TALKS SOONER OR LATER WHAT IS DONE IN THE "DARK" OF OUR DAILY LIVES WILL COME TO "LIGHT" IN CHURCH.

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS IS ANOTHER FORM OF “HYPOCRISY”. WHEN EVERYTHING COMES FROM THE LIPS OR MOUTH AND NOTHING FROM THE HEART THEN WE HAVE LOST THE MEANING OF WHY WE ARE HERE. RUTS AND ROUTINES CAN BE FERTILE GROUND FOR GROWING HYPOCRISY. EVERY DAY THAT WE ARE BLESSED TO LIVE, WE MUST SEE ALL AROUND US AS REFRESHED AND NEW – PEOPLE, THINGS, NATURE, AND OPPORTUNITIES NOT LOOKING AT THEM AS PROBLEMS. LIFE EACH DAY IS A BLESSING!!!

ONE OF THE COMMON COMPLAINTS OF NON-CHURCH PEOPLE OR PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEFT THE CHURCH IS THE HYPOCRISY OF ‘NOT WALKING THE WALK’. THE COMMONLY USED PHRASE “NOT PRACTICING WHAT YOU PREACH”. WHEN PEOPLE SEE NO DIFFERENCE IN US, AND HAVE NO DESIRE TO INQUIRE OF US “WHAT IS IT YOU HAVE, I WANT IT?”

ONE OF THE SUBJECTS JESUS TALKED MOST ABOUT ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT WAS HOW WE SPEND SO MUCH OF OUR TIME FINDING FAULT WITH OTHERS! HOW MUCH DO THE WORDS WE SPOKE EARLIER “***FORGIVE OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US***”? THAT IS “NOT PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH” FOR SURE AND THAT IS HYPOCRISY!! *If we do not have a right relationship with someone else in this “body of Christ” or you leave this morning and go complain to friends about the church and its people that is hypocrisy, full blown!!!*

REMEMBER EPHESIANS 4:32 “ *Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. **Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*** “ THAT IS WALKING THE WALK. **YOU KNOW WHEN WE HAVE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE THERE IS A PEACE THAT GOD INTENDED FOR US TO HAVE. IT TAKES THE LOVE OF CHRIST FOR US IN OUR WEAKNESS TO STEP UP AND FORGIVE.** *In Today's World We Must Guard Against Being “All Show And No Go”.* WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, A LIVING ORGANISM, NOT AN ORGANIZATION. JESUS RAILED AGAINST THE PHARISEES FOR THAT VERY THING – LIKE AN ORGANIZATION ALL RULES AND REGULATIONS NOT RELATIONSHIPS.

ANOTHER STORY -- Amos got saved and went to church one Sunday with a lot of excitement for the Lord. He was told by an usher, Amos if you want to be a member at this church, you need to wear a suit, so Amos got a suit. The next week he was told, Amos if you want to be a member at this church, get rid of that worn out Bible, get you a new one, so Amos got a new Bible. The next week he was told, Amos you need to get a better car to be a member at this church, so he got a new car. But still he wasn't allowed to be a member. He went home and prayed to the Lord, “Lord I have done everything to get into that church and I still can't get in.” The Lord said, Amos, don't feel bad, I have been trying to get into that church for years.

WITH STORIES OF THIS NATURE, HUMOROUS AS IT MAY SEEN THERE IS ALWAYS AN OUNCE OF TRUTH TO IT, AND WE KNOW BECAUSE WE HAVE PROBABLY SEEN IT OR EXPERIENCED IT.

IT IS HYPOCRITICAL TO “MAJOR IN THE MINORS”. WE ALL KNOW HOW MANY TIMES JESUS POINTED OUT HOW THE PHARISEES PAID MORE ATTENTION FOR LOOKING “GOOD” THAN “LIVING RIGHT”. THEY COMPLAINED MORE THAT JESUS HEALED ON THE SABBATH THAN HEALED THE MAN. **HYPOCRISY CAN LOOK SO RELIGIOUS, SOUND SO RELIGIOUS AND FROM APPEARANCES SEEM TO BE A WONDERFUL THING. JESUS WARNED US TO BE ON THE WATCH FOR IT AND KEEP OURSELVES FROM IT. HOW?**

HERE ARE WAYS TO AVOID IT IN OUR OWN LIFE. WE MUST NOT POSSESS A FALSE SECURITY ABOUT OUR RELIGION. WE BEGIN TO BELIEVE THAT WE ARE RELIGIOUS ENOUGH, THROWING OFF THE IDEA THAT WE ARE SINNERS. *A friend i knew once told me the closer his relationship with God got, the more he realized how unworthy he really was. But that did not drive him into depression and a “woe is me” attitude, but it drove him to seek God even more!!!* THERE WAS ALWAYS ROOM TO DEEPEN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD AND HIS DESIRES BY READING SCRIPTURE AND BEING IN STUDIES. IT IS A LIFE LONG PROCESS AND AS METHODISTS WE ARE TO BE MOVING TO SANCTIFICATION – THE ACT OF BEING MORE CHRIST-LIKE.

HYPOCRISY IS DANGEROUS BECAUSE IT CAN DISILLUSION NON-CHURCHGOERS. ONE OF THE REASONS PEOPLE WALK AWAY FROM CHURCH ARE THE PEOPLE IN IT. MARGARET TOOK ME TO HER CHURCH AND WE DECIDED TO ATTEND A VERY IMPORTANT MEETING OF THE CHURCH. WELL LET ME TELL YOU, WE BOTH WONDERED WHAT WE HAD GOTTEN OURSELVES INTO AS THE WORST WAS ON DISPLAY IN THAT MEETING – SHOUTING, NAME CALLING AND MORE. WE DID COME BACK FIGURING IT WAS NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHURCH ALL THE TIME. HOW WOULD SOMEONE REACT THOUGH JUST ATTENDING FOR THE FIRST TIME VIEW THAT? WOULD WE BE COMFORTABLE WITH A STRANGER AT ONE OF OUR MEETINGS?

WE MUST NOT JUDGE OUR LIFE ONLY ON OUTWARD RESULTS. WHAT IS THAT VOICE SAYING TO YOU WHEN YOU ARE ALONE? WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS? **THE INSIDE SHOULD MATCH THE OUTSIDE. JESUS TOLD US IT IS WHAT COMES FROM WITHIN THAT MATTERS NOT WHAT WE EAT.**

IN CLOSING, REMEMBER AT THE END OF TODAY'S READING JESUS SPEAKS OF OUR WORTH TO GOD THE FATHER. **JESUS TELLS US WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR STRUGGLES, BUT WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN THAT GIVES US THE WORDS WHEN WE NEED THEM.**

WHEN WE REMEMBER SUCH THINGS, THE PROMISES, THEN WE CAN LIVE A LIFE WITHOUT BEING HYPOCRITICAL. MAY WE ALL WALK IN THE SPIRIT. AMEN.