

Where Are the Hypocrites? (Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

“A hypocrite is an inconsistent person who says one thing, does another and knows they are doing something wrong but puts up a front.” — Dr. Timothy Keller

I guess we can say that hypocrites can be found most anywhere. There was a hypocrite among the first disciples of Christ, and I cannot deny the fact that hypocrites have been found in some churches. They have brought great harm to the cause of Christ and it is especially shameful and disappointing when church leaders have been found guilty of moral failure.

However, if hypocrites are perceived to be in our churches, it may be because of a common misunderstanding. People tend to think that church members should always be better than others in reputation and character. But the church is not a showplace for saints; it is more like a hospital for sinners. “It is by grace you are saved through faith . . . not by works so that no one can boast,” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

As a condition for membership, the Christian church does not require proof of good works and fine character traits, but rather a public acknowledgement of one’s unworthiness and need of divine help. Not the proud boast, “What a good boy/girl am I,” but rather the prayer, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

R.C. Sproul writes, “In one sense, the church has fewer hypocrites than any institution because by definition the church is a haven for sinners. If the church claimed that all of her members were of fine character, then her claim would be hypocritical. But no such claim is made by the church. There is no slander in the charge that the church is full of sinners. Such a statement only complements the church for fulfilling her divinely appointed task.”

This means that our churches will have members who are spiritually and relationally immature. In all fairness, the world should evaluate Christians as works in progress rather than finished saints. We should be patient and avoid unfair judgments, especially toward new believers. God is not finished with any of us yet.

What would a Church be like if it followed the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ, her founder? Not a place where good people display their medals, but a safe place where forgiven people could be honest and help one another draw closer to God.

Can anyone of us honestly say that our lifestyle or behaviour is always above reproach? Sometimes we slip and fall back into a self-centred life of disobedience. But if we are part of a church when these slips occur, we can have fellow strugglers to help us get back on track.

Never forget that when we stand before God to give an account of our lives, we won't have to answer for the hypocrites. But each one of us will be accountable before God for his/herself alone.

“If you want to find a hypocrite, first go home and look in the mirror.”

Billy Sunday