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THE NEW SHOFAR

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

Not everyone who says “Lord! Lord!” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven

Whether we notice them or not, the world watches Christians, observe our every word and deed. Once they know we are Christians, they will compare our conduct to what they know about Christianity. And as we know all too well, they are on the lookout for our failures.

And, whether we like it or not, we represent the Church and, in turn, Jesus Christ. That is a huge responsibility. It is one many Christians would like to pretend does not exist. It demands that our actions be above reproach. It forces us to make a choice: the world's way or God's way. There is no room for fence sitting, for trying to keep everyone happy. The only **Way** is God's **Way** and whatever that demands of us.

Remember how Paul put it... *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* It is at this point the temptation to biblical hypocrisy come into play. The question we need to be asking at this point is “How do we resist”?

That truth is that avoiding Christian hypocrisy is too big a job for us to handle on our own. We have a nature that is susceptible to sinning, and the temptations can appear to be too hard to resist and at the same time, too subtle for us to even notice. Over and over the Bible tells us we can live the Christian life only through the power of Christ within us and so it is to Christ we must turn, it is Christ we need to model. We are to be as Christ in the world for that is what our profession of faith demands of us.

How do we understand hypocrisy

In quoting the prophet Isaiah, Jesus gives us a starting point for our reflections... *This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* What Jesus was doing was speaking the hard truth the Pharisees needed to hear. He told them directly that they were hypocrites:

1. This people honours me with their lips.
2. ***Their hearts*** are far from me.
3. They worship in vain.
4. They present their own human laws as if they were God's.

What then is the key message we should take from this for our own lives? We should take from it two simple facts. First, the will of God must take hold of our lives and become the basis and foundation of everything. His will, His law, His precepts are our rock and the foundation of our lives. God has established His truth as the basis of human life and we must strive to humbly embrace His law that we might live.

His law includes all of the revealed teachings of our faith, found in Scripture and in the Church. To this we can add all that we hear God speaking to us in our own lives. The Pharisees, in their lack of humility, could not see these truths. Instead, they held onto their

own ideas and convictions, straitjacketing God into being a god of their own making, shaping God's demands into society friendly suggestions. God chastised them harshly for this. They professed a faithfulness to the teachings and traditions of the prophets but followed worldly expectations and pressures in their daily living.

Secondly, we should realize that when we embrace the divine law, and God's particular will for our lives, we will be pure of heart and will be empowered to love Him with outward expressions. We will worship Him from our hearts and this will flow through our every word and deed. But this will not happen if we do not begin with His divine law.

When we do not allow our beliefs to be the inward focus of our hearts — to be the things we truly believe in, the things that shape us and determine how we live in the world — our "faith" then becomes limited to outward actions. Empty.

It is at this point we open ourselves up to the dangers of being shaped and driven by the world around us, by fads and promises, the so called "influencers" who expect us to compromise our beliefs, to make them less "offensive". We profess Jesus as our Lord and Saviour but bow to the contemporary mores and philosophies. We become hypocrites by making other people the standard of our morality and holiness. But other people are not the standard by which we live, contemporary philosophies not our guiding principles. Jesus is. Jesus as the Word of God is the standard the only standard that counts.

We do not "play being Christian" we live "being Christian", doing Christian

Making other people the standard sets us up for disappointment. Nobody is perfect — not Christians, not anybody. Nothing but the things "from above" can satisfy our needs and necessities, fill us with an enduring sense of peace and satisfaction. Our hearts will not find rest until we rest in God. Only in God are we at home. That is why we all need a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the model for all men and women and the closer we imitate his way of living in the world and living under God, the closer we come to being the people God calls us to be; to carry out the ministries we were created to live out.

The word hypocrite comes from a Greek word that means "play actor" and this is what Jesus was speaking out against. A hypocrite is someone pretending to be something that he or she is not in order to receive recognition or gain. In the Bible, hypocrisy is a result of pride. Humble followers of God seek to live according to His laws because they love God and other people—not because they will be recognized or honoured for it.

Hypocrites go through the outward signs of being faithful Christians, they tick all of the boxes for religion - whether in giving alms, praying, going to church, or fasting – but their heart marches to a different tune.

It is worth noting how English concept of hypocrisy as "failing to practice what one preaches" is rarely found in the Bible. Biblical hypocrisy is claiming Jesus Christ as our one and only Lord and Saviour while at the same time, living as though we are governed by another power, follow other priorities, subject to the latest and most prevalent movement or pressure group. Hypocrites lack the courage of their faith and bow before whatever wind is blowing the strongest. They convince themselves that they truly believe in the Oneness of God and yet compromise the Gospel demands when they feel they ask too much of us. They are not atheists for they are governed by too many gods.