



**November 5**

# THE NEW SHOFAR

**They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Titus 1:16**

## **Is the Church really full of Hypocrites?**

“Christians are hypocrites” is a long-standing criticism of the Christian faith. It is often given as one of the main reasons that non-Christians are not interested in Christianity. The feeling is that if Christians can’t even live up to their own ideals, then why should anyone else take it seriously? Most of us would probably agree that far too many Christians are hypocrites. Some are hypocrites through-and-through: Christians in name only. Others are genuine Christians who practice hypocrisy for a time before getting back to following Jesus again.

**But** what is hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is about double-mindedness. It is trying to be two contrary things at the same time. It is about claiming to believe one thing but living out something else. Very often it serves self-interest. Hypocrisy looks like applying your moral principles to others but failing to apply them to yourself (**Matthew 7:5**). It looks like trying to live by God’s way and the world’s way at the same time (**James 1:6-9; Luke 16:13**). It looks like claiming to follow Jesus’ way of love, but secretly hating various followers of Jesus (**1 John 4:20**). It looks like calling Jesus Lord and refusing to obey him (**Luke 6:46**). It looks like outwardly expressing devotion to God but having insincere intentions in your heart (**Mark 7:6**).

Sadly, hypocrites are often not even aware of their double-mindedness. Very often they will be lying to themselves about their integrity as much as to anyone else. That is the frightening thing about sin – we often deceive ourselves and even misunderstand our own motives (Galatians 6:3; Hebrews 3:13). We live a half lie for long enough and it becomes the truth.

## **Sin does not make someone a hypocrite**

Christians are not hypocrites because we fall into sin. We need to be clear on this. The Bible teaches that all Christians will keep on sinning until Jesus returns: *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us* (1 John 1:8). In other words, a Christian would be a hypocrite if they claimed to live an entirely good, moral life. Christians sinning is not contrary to our creed. In a most confusing way, sinning is an unavoidable part of the Christian life. We profess one thing and yet struggle to live out those very Gospel mandates we believe come from the very mouth of God.

We Christians have a complicated relationship to sin. Jesus died on the cross for our sin. Jesus has empowered us to live righteous lives albeit imperfectly whilst we wait for the resurrection on the Last Day. Only then will we be able to live perfectly righteous lives. In the meantime, we will find ourselves sinning and in need of regular repenting and spiritual transformation. And that is where the outside world misunderstands us, wrongly assuming that Christianity is little more than a set of moral laws. Thus sinning, in the eyes of the world

at least, turns Christians into hypocrites: moral-code-keepers with moral failings are hypocrites.

But Christians are not perfect moral people. We are forgiven people. We are people who are growing to be more and more obedient to God as he helps and transforms us, but we still often struggle with sin in the meantime. Weakness and failure are part of my life as a Christian.

### **But when is a Christian a hypocrite?**

There are two main ways in which Christians can be hypocrites. **Firstly**, if we try to live as if sin does not matter. That is, we become lukewarm, half-hearted in our commitment to follow the way of Jesus. Authentic Christians strive to live righteous lives. Hypocrites treat sin as if it is not a big deal. The only truly Christian attitude to sin is to fight against it (Galatians 5:17).

**Secondly**, a hypocritical Christian is someone who *refuses to repent* of their sins, to even acknowledge that they have sins in the first place. Repentance is the basic experience of the Christian life. It is the only response that makes any sense once sin has been identified. See it for what it is. Label it for what it is. Confess it to God. Confess it to whoever you sinned against and be reconciled with them. Resolve to not repeat it. Call on God to help us not to repeat it. And praise God for the fact that in Christ divine is fresh available to us every day.

**NOTE: Sinlessness** is not the opposite of Christian hypocrisy. **Regular repentance** is the opposite of Christian hypocrisy. In repentance we engage with the uncomfortable reality of sin and apply the gospel to it. In our morally confused, compromised and hurting world a church that knows how to repent of sin and find renewed relationships with God and one another is a surprisingly attractive place. It is a gift we have from God for the world.

### **Hypocrites are deceptive frauds**

According to St Gregory hypocrites have “*cunning minds*” and often manage to escape the attention of other people. They can deliberately hide and not express their true feelings. Sometimes they work behind the scenes. They pretend to be pious, but in their private lives they do not observe the laws of God and brazenly do whatever they want, even if that is not in accord with the Gospel or the traditions of the Church. They give the impression of being a bosom friend of another person and then find an opportunity to betray them. It is as if they have split personalities: they want God but are drawn by worldly ways. They are attracted by the word of God, but are seduced by secular things. It is this dual way of living that sets them apart. They are one thing to the Christian community but when the spotlight is not on them, they show their true colours. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the way they treat their brothers and sisters in faith. Hypocritical clergy and laity have done untold damage to the Body of Christ. They remain the major reason why many people’s faith has withered why people do not seek a life in Christ.

Unfortunately, hypocrisy continues to flourish in both the world and in the Church. There are those who have the appearance of people striving for piety, justice and sanctity, but who, in their private lives are impious, unjust, judgmental, harsh and utterly lacking in God’s grace. As a spiritual prophylactic, we know that the more we strive for lives of humble obedience,

repentance and godliness, the more the grace of God empowers and blesses us. No matter how attractive hypocrites are in their manners, they eventually repel us. People who are genuine, on the other hand, even if they have no other great qualities, attract other people. They're the ones who've become the unsung saints of our Church and may we imitate them in our lives.