

QUESTIONING JESUS

Week 5: The Question of Hypocrisy

Key idea:

Every human sins and fails to live up to God's righteous standards, but the Gospel offers forgiveness to those who confront this fact and openly confess and repent of sin.

Key text:

Matthew 23:1–13

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples:² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.⁵ “Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;⁶ they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;⁷ they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’⁸ “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.⁹ And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.¹⁰ Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant.¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.¹³ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Key points:

1. Jesus strongly condemns true hypocrisy - no one hates hypocrisy more than God!
2. A hypocrite pretends to be someone they are not, performing for human approval so that others will think more highly of them than is deserved, often to attain a position of influence or power.
3. When someone complains of Christian hypocrisy it is critical that we discover if what they are complaining about is true hypocrisy, a disagreement with God's Law, or merely an excuse to avoid grappling with the claims of the Gospel.
4. The ultimate problem is sin, not hypocrisy - and we all need to be saved from sin!

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's text and teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What is the essence of hypocrisy as Jesus defines it in Matthew 23?
3. How do we respond when we encounter real hypocrisy? How do we think hypocrisy in the church affects those who do not know Christ?
4. When someone complains of Christian hypocrisy, how should we respond? Should we immediately get defensive? Why or why not? Should we simply agree that Christians are hypocrites? If not - how should we try to engage in the conversation?
5. How should I respond to sin in my own life? If I am honest, what am I tempted to do when others see my sin? Will this response promote or undermine the cause of the Gospel?
6. What did Bret mean by saying that the ultimate problem is not hypocrisy, but sin? Is this just an excuse for Christian hypocrisy? Why or why not?
7. What part does confession and repentance for sin play in my life? Is it a current, consistent practice - or something I only do as a last resort?
8. Is my life promoting or hindering the cause of the Gospel? Can I be rightly accused of the same type of hypocrisy for which Jesus condemned the Pharisees? Am I asking God for power to overcome sin in my life?
9. What did Bret mean when he said: "We must remember that we are not pointing others to ourselves, but to Christ, for we are servants, not Saviors!" What is my task with unbelieving friends? Do I present myself more as a servant or a savior?

Resources for Further Study:

[*The Question of Hypocrisy*](#) - Sojourn Church Discussion Guide

[Questioning Evangelism](#) - by Randy Newman - especially chapter "If Jesus Is So Great, Why Are Some of His Followers Such Jerks?"