

HYPOCRISY

Background

'Hypocrisy' comes from the Greek word for 'play-acting'. The actor is not really the person he or she is playing. In a stage drama we might think highly of good acting, but in reality such pretence is not virtuous – making out that we are what we are not. This is what 'hypocrisy' means in English: being false. As such it is seen in the Bible as a sin, especially when it takes the form of religious pretence. Religion can be put on like an actor's mask or costume in a vain attempt to fool God, others, or even ourselves.

Whilst hypocrisy is deplored in the Old Testament, particularly when it emerges in the form of insincere worship, it comes in for especially strong criticism in the New Testament. Jesus continually exposed this sin. It goes hand-in-hand with adopting a form of religion without it being inwardly true. The hypocrite can even fool himself and be blind to his own spiritual pretence, so that he is in danger of sealing his own eternal ruin. Lacking the real power of the Spirit in their lives, some 'Christians' act out a part – perhaps through outward forms of religion such as ritual or through pious talk and empty claims. One of the gravest sins in God's sight, it is a sin of 'attitude' (of a false heart) more than of 'action' (false deeds). Hypocritical acts spring from a hypocritical heart. In our Lord's teaching it is especially singled out as deserving hell.

Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5, 15; 15:7–9; 23:5–33; 24:51; Mark 12:15; Luke 12:1–2; 13:15; Acts 5:1–11; Romans 12:9; James 3:17; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Peter 2:1

Hypocrisy and counterfeit Christianity will be particularly widespread in the last days before Christ's Return

1 Timothy 4:1–3; 2 Timothy 3:1, 5

Counterfeit Christians

Some may masquerade as:

<i>False Christs</i>	Matthew 24:24
<i>False apostles</i>	2 Corinthians 11:13
<i>False prophets</i>	Matthew 24:11, 24; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1
<i>False evangelists</i>	Galatians 1:6-9 (those who preach a false gospel)
<i>False pastors</i>	Acts 20:29-30
<i>False teachers</i>	2 Peter 2:1
<i>False brothers</i>	2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4

Whilst we are to be aware of the possibility of hypocrisy in all its religious forms, we should be especially alert for hypocrisy in ourselves.