

# Regarding Hypocrites and Hypocrisy

## 1 Timothy 4:2-3

Have you ever heard the comment from someone that they won't go to church because the church is full of **hypocrites**? Christ had warned His disciples not to be hypocrites (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16) and He often called the Pharisees on their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:13-15, 25-29). Today we will see that Paul also warns about hypocrites.

Now, some might wonder, "*What's wrong with a little pretending? What's wrong with trying to look like a Christian even if I'm not?*" Well, what do you think about this fellow?

"He made free use of Christian vocabulary. He talked about the blessing of the Almighty and the Christian confessions which would become the pillars of the new government. He assumed the earnestness of a man weighed down by historic responsibility. He handed out pious stories to the press, especially to the church papers. He showed his tattered Bible and declared that he drew the strength for his great work from it as scores of pious people welcomed him as a man sent from God."<sup>1</sup>

Sounds like an OK guy, right? Think again.

"Indeed, Adolf Hitler was a master of outward religiosity--with no inward reality!"<sup>2</sup>

Let us read the text for today, and for the sake of review we will go back and look at verse 1 as well:

1 Timothy 4:1-3 NAS

<sup>1</sup> **But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,**

<sup>2</sup> **by means of the hypocrisy<sup>3</sup> of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,**

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<sup>1</sup> *Today in the Word*, June 3, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Encarta* © World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> *men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*

So just what is **hypocrisy**? “The use of the Greek word for hypocrite refers to being a **play-actor**. An actor usually wore a mask and in speech and action imitated the character of someone else while on a stage to be seen by others. The English transliteration of hypocrite has the meaning of **pretending to be what one is not**, especially in the area of religion or morality.”<sup>4</sup> The Encarta World English Dictionary defines it as “*The false claim to or pretense of having admirable principles, beliefs, or feelings.*” **Most of us think of hypocrites as fakes, phonies, pretenders, counterfeits.** They look on the surface to be the real thing but actually are far removed from being genuine.

“Hypocrites play at religion when people can see them in church; but they live, talk and act much differently elsewhere. They watch the same movies, tell the same jokes, commit the same sins and have the same bad attitudes as others of the world when outside of their ‘religious’ setting.”<sup>5</sup>

Warren Wiersbe says that as we look at our Christian teachers and leaders, one of the ways we can discern false from true teachers is to look at their lives.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits’ (Matt.7:15-20). These false teachers preach one thing but practice another. They tell their disciples what to do, but they do not do it themselves. . . . One of the marks of a true servant of God is his honesty and integrity: He practices what he preaches. This does not mean he is sinlessly perfect, but that he sincerely seeks to obey the Word of God. He tries to maintain a good conscience.”<sup>6</sup>

We also need to use great discernment and know the Scriptures well ourselves. C. S. Lewis refers to, “. . . *the devilish cunning of the enemies’ plan. By mixing a little truth with it they had made their lie far stronger.*”<sup>7</sup> That is certainly how Satan is working in many churches today, by taking a little truth and mixing it up with lots of error.

The phrase that opens verse 2, “*hypocrisy of liars,*” is powerful. “*Hypocrisy*” says a lot, but to follow it with “*liars*” underscores the evil in these false teachers who would be great pretenders with no conscience to frame their behaviors.

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<sup>4</sup> Contributed by Terry Laughlin to

<http://www.sermoncentral.com/Illustrations/SearchResults.asp?Category=&Page=2&Sort=rank&keyword=hypocrisy&AdvancedSearch=0&ExactPhrase=&OrKeyword1=&OrKeyword2=&OrKeyword3=&WordsToExclude=&ScriptureBookA2=&ScriptureVerse2=&TopicID=0&since2=0&Submitted2=0>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Faithful*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1981, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Kilby, Clyde S., ed. *C. S. Lewis: A Mind Awake*, quoting from *The Last Battle*. New York: A Harvest Book/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, p. 107.

All that we talked about in verse one has happened because **of the lies that were told by people pretending that they were followers of Christ but in reality were under Satan's control.** These spirits or demons enter men and women who appear to be very spiritual and religious. They preach, teach, and speak as if they were very learned and very righteous, while all the time hiding their true motives, to help Satan take Christ's kingdom from Him and rule it himself. These pretenders have a **"seared conscience."**

Now just what is a "seared conscience?" In general anything that is seared carries the meaning of being burned or marked with an intense heat. In this case we have a picture of being branded with a branding iron. These people bear the marks of their sin in the sight of God just as if they had been branded on their foreheads. You see it was customary in ancient times to brand with a hot iron a person who had been guilty of great crimes.<sup>8</sup> So Paul is saying here that the branding iron is applied to the conscience of these false teachers leaving the brand of "liar." This person is a no good, dirty, rotten liar with a seared conscience. They have ignored the warnings of their conscience for so long that they have come to a point where their conscience no longer bothers them. It has become numb to those promptings that would say, "this is wrong." These individuals have no problem whatsoever defying God and even fighting against Him, taking on the role of an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:1- 4, 13-15 (NLT):

<sup>1</sup> *I hope you will put up with a little more of my foolishness. Please bear with me.*

<sup>2</sup> *For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ.*

<sup>3</sup> *But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.*

<sup>4</sup> *You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.*

<sup>13</sup> *These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.*

<sup>14</sup> *But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

<sup>15</sup> *So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.*

Another good example of **seared consciences** is found in:

2 Peter 2:1- 3, 6-10, 12-14 (NLT):

<sup>8</sup> *Baker New Testament Commentary – Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1955), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 146.*

<sup>1</sup> *But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them. In this way, they will bring sudden destruction on themselves.*

<sup>2</sup> *Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of these teachers, the way of truth will be slandered.*

<sup>3</sup> *In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.*

<sup>6</sup> *Later, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people.*

<sup>7</sup> *But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him.*

<sup>8</sup> *Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day.*

<sup>9</sup> *So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment.*

<sup>10</sup> *He is especially hard on those who follow their own twisted sexual desire, and who despise authority. These people are proud and arrogant, daring even to scoff at supernatural beings without so much as trembling.*

<sup>12</sup> *These **false teachers** are like unthinking animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed. They scoff at things they do not understand, and like animals, they will be destroyed.*

<sup>13</sup> *Their destruction is their reward for the harm they have done. They love to indulge in evil pleasures in broad daylight. They are a disgrace and a stain among you. They delight in deception even as they eat with you in your fellowship meals.*

<sup>14</sup> *They commit adultery with their eyes, and their desire for sin is never satisfied. They lure unstable people into sin, and they are well trained in greed. They live under God's curse.*

1 Timothy 4:1-3 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *But **the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith**, paying attention to **deceitful spirits** and doctrines of demons,*

<sup>2</sup> ***by means of the hypocrisy of liars** seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,*

<sup>3</sup> *men **who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods** which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*

Now let us return to our text in 1 Timothy 4 and concentrate on verse 3. What would these hypocritical lying teachers do? One thing would be to **Forbid marriage**. These hypocritical priests pretended that living a single life allowed a Christian to be more committed to serving Christ and living a more perfect Christian life. This attitude was embraced by the **Essenes**, a religious sect within **Judaism**, and it was also adopted by the **Roman Catholics** who require all their clergy to live a single life by a vow of **continence<sup>9</sup> (or abstinence)**.

These hypocritical false leaders would also tell their followers **to abstain from certain foods**. Many religious leaders from varying religious faiths did not allow certain meats to be eaten, some all the time and others only on specified occasions. Paul tells us here that such teaching was exactly the opposite of that which God desired for His people, and that those who know God's truth would never teach such a thing. Such false teachers promoted the concept that anything physical or sensuous is bad for a Christian. They would regard fasting, therefore, as praiseworthy. (It is true that sincere genuine Christians do at times fast in obedience to the Lord, but the motivations are very different. They do it privately and to honor God, whereas the false teachers instruct their followers to refrain from food in order to please the leaders or to go along with the regulations of the cult.)

A partial fulfillment of the prophecy here in the first verses of 1 Timothy came in the second century with the initiation of the philosophy of **asceticism**, which promised happiness and perfection for those who gave up the comforts of life.<sup>10</sup> We also see in the same century the appearance of **gnosticism**, which basically emphasized that one could receive salvation through knowledge. In fact, **gnostics** believed that they could become so smart that they would even surpass the intelligence of God.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Gnostics, a good God could not have created the world, for the world is made of matter, and matter is the basic problem. They maintain that it was the God of the Old Testament who created the world, the human body, and matter. The Gnostics said that **such things are our enemies and we must overcome the dominance they have in our lives**.

The spirit of **Gnosticism** has really never gone away over the centuries and it is still alive and well in our society today. Whenever human reason or mankind's ability to save themselves is considered a possible road to salvation over and above Christian faith, you can take it to the bank that gnosticism is part of the logic behind such a belief.

Gnosticism has no respect for the clear orders which God gave His people. God could not make it any clearer than He did in Genesis.

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<sup>9</sup> *Baker New Testament Commentary – Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1955), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 147.

<sup>10</sup> Merriam-Webster, Inc: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Eleventh ed.* Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Ferguson, Sinclair B.; Wright, David; Packer, J.I.; *New Bible Dictionary*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL (1988), gnosticism, p.272.

Genesis 2:24 (ESV):

<sup>24</sup> *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

Genesis 9:1-6 (ESV):

<sup>1</sup> *And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*

<sup>2</sup> *The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.*

<sup>3</sup> *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.*

<sup>4</sup> *But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.*

<sup>5</sup> *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

These dunderheads who Paul just predicted would come in the first three verses of 1 Timothy 4:4, tell people that they should not eat certain foods that God explicitly created for them to eat with thanksgiving. It was all part of the hypocrisy. They would make themselves out to be super spiritual because they were denying themselves.

Now, we have focused a lot on the hypocrisy of these false teachers. However, we should pay close attention Paul's warnings even if we are not leaders or teachers. Everyone is in danger of becoming at least somewhat hypocritical, even though Christ warned us against it. People start with "little white lies" or with "small" deceptions about the kind of life they live. They put on the mask of a spiritual person when they come to church, but the other six days of the week they live something totally different. If you are a person who does that, take heed. Your conscience can become seared also. You too are at risk for totally ignoring God's still small voice when He says to you "*follow Me, be an imitator of Christ.*" James calls us to "*confess your faults one to another and pray for one another*" (James 5:16). Do you see how that practice can keep us from becoming hypocrites? When we confess, we have to take off our masks and be honest. When we all do that, there is no room for one person feeling superior to the other. And then we pray for each other; we pray for God's help and strength in these areas of weakness that we have just confessed.

Warren Wiersbe points out that:

*"An apostate is not just wrong doctrinally; he is wrong morally. His personal life became wrong before his doctrines changed. In fact, it is likely that he changed his*

teachings so that he could continue his sinful living and pacify his conscience. *Believing and behaving* always go together.”<sup>12</sup>

A minute ago, we referred to the idea that we are called to be imitators of Christ. Do you think you could ever be mistaken for Jesus?

A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night’s dinner. In their rush, with tickets and briefcases, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table that held a display of apples. Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to reach the plane in time for their nearly missed boarding.

All but one. He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings, and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl who’s apple stand had been overturned. He told his buddies to go on without him, waved goodbye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did.

The 16-year-old girl was totally blind! She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping and no one to care for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket. When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?” She nodded through her tears.

He continued on with, *“I hope we didn’t spoil your day too badly.”*

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, *“Mister . . .”* He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, *“Are you Jesus?”* He stopped in mid-stride, and he wondered. Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: *“Are you Jesus?”*<sup>13</sup>

And what about you? Do you live your life in such a way that others might ask, *“Are you Jesus?”* Let us all purpose to forsake any hypocrisy that haunts us and

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<sup>12</sup> Op cit. Wiersbe, p. 56.

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determine to live lives that reflect our Lord Jesus Christ in our every action.