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“The Masks We Wear”

There are 13 references to being a hypocrite in the book of Matthew alone, and at least 4 more can be found in the New Testament. Many, but not all these criticisms are directed at the scribes and pharisees. Yet others are directed to common folk like you and me.

In Matthew 6:5, we find:

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you they have received their reward.”

In Matthew 6:16, we find:

“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men.”

Matthew 7:5 is the most well-known reference to hypocrisy:

“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”

Nelson’s Bible Dictionary defines hypocrisy as “pretending to be what one is not.” The New Testament meaning of hypocrisy and hypocrite reflects its use in Greek drama. In the Greek theater, a hypocrite was one who wore a mask and played a part on the stage, imitating the speech, mannerisms, and conduct of the character portrayed. What

are the masks we wear? Who do I pretend to be whom I am not? How does that impact my practice of the Christian faith? Here are two examples.

1. The Mask of Plesantry: When asked how I am, how many times have I responded, "Fine, and how are you?" when I may feel be feeling any number of emotions. And then how many times when I have returned the plesantry, saying, "And how are you?" do I really care or want to truly know what burdens are upon my brother's or sister's shoulders? I do believe that the mask of plesantry is one which I frequently wear when I feel the need to hide or pretend to be someone who I am not.
2. The Presumptive Good Samaritan Mask. I have also been known to wear this mask. We all hope we will do the right thing at the right time. But I must confess that I frequently act more like the Levite who passed by the robbery victim.

Love thy neighbor as thyself seems like a manageable prescription for being a faithful Christian, and yet sometimes, I stumble.

While living in upstate New York, my wife Lynne worked as a visiting public health nurse. One stormy winter's eve, Lynne received a call from a patient who lived alone in a trailer and had fallen out of his wheelchair. I was promptly drafted for the job of driving up a steep and slippery snowy country road to help him. I first protested and complained that it just was not practical to drive my rear wheeled rusty pickup in that wintry weather. As in many debates in our household, I lost this one, and reluctantly proceeded. Upon entering a dilapidated and drafty trailer, I found a tragic sight; an older man with one leg amputated, sitting on the floor of his living room, in a puddle of his own urine, unable to get back into his wheelchair, wearing only a flannel shirt on his back. I picked him up and put him back safely into his wheelchair. Once I knew he was ok, I cleaned up his urine from the floor and honestly considered it to be an honor to do so. I felt transformed as my compass had directed me back to true north.

Driving home, I felt so fortunate. I realized I had nearly persuaded myself not to go. But through the grace of God (and through the prodding of Lynne), I learned to step outside of my comfort zone and to love my neighbor as myself, even when it seemed very inconvenient for me at the time.

The good news is that we are not alone on this journey. We have the love, grace, and forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as His shining exemplary life as a guiding light.

~Written by Tom Webster

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