

From the Pastor's Pen

Hypocrisy: "Pretending to be what one is not, or to feel what one does not feel!" (Harpers's Bible Dictionary)

The term "poser" comes to mind; not too long ago I watched the movie *Wild Hogs*, and "posers" was the term a motorcycle gang used to define the four friends who called themselves "The Wild Hogs."

Like any other Pastor, I often invite folks to come and worship the Lord with us. Occasionally, the response I receive to that invitation is, "No thanks, I don't need to be with a bunch of hypocrites," to which I usually reply, "I would never permit any *man* to keep me from God's house!"

I have been pastoring God's people for some twenty years and have attended church for nearly thirty, and to be very honest, I don't see very many people who fit the "hypocrisy" bill. Most church-goers I encounter are very quick to say, "I am not anywhere near perfect, and I sure wish I did better at following God." In fact, if you ask them why they go to church, they would most likely tell you that they go for two reasons: first, to worship God, and secondly, to find help for their souls.

Let me give a case-in-point: About fifteen years ago a lady who was in her late forties stopped by the church and asked if she could talk with me. She attended a church in the area, but not mine.

When she sat down, she began to cry, and, after waiting a few minutes for her to gain composure, I asked her what the matter was. "I think I am doomed to hell," she said, sobbing. So I queried about her relationship with Christ, "Have you repented of your sins and received Christ as your Savior? Do you go to church faithfully? Do you live your life according to the will of Jesus Christ?" To all of these she responded, "Yes, to the best of my ability."

"Then what is the problem?" I asked her, as she continued to sob.

"I just can't seem to stop smoking," she answered, "no matter how hard I try. I have gone to the altar on numerous occasions and begged God to help me, and I just can't quit." As I nodded encouragingly, she continued, "I have tried to quit at least a dozen times, only to fail, and I know Jesus cannot love me, because I am a sinner. I am doomed to hell!"

I did my best that day to assure her that God did indeed love her, that Jesus was walking this hard road with her, and that if she didn't give up, that she, with Jesus' help, would get the victory.

She sincerely wanted to quit smoking and could not understand why this battle was so hard or why it was taking so long. I am not sure I was able to convince her to persist in her desire to live for God and gain the victory. I never saw her again.

I would guess an outsider, who didn't know her heart's desperate desire – to clean up her habits and live for Christ – would look at her from their perspective and see a smoking church-goer and, as such, might label her a "hypocrite." Yet to Jesus, who knows her heart, she was anything but a hypocrite.

I occasionally think about her and wonder if she went the distance with the Lord – if she ever let God help her get the victory. I sure hope so!

Let's remember,

"...The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

I suspect that there are a few hypocrites who go to church and pretend to know Jesus, but I have a hunch there are not as many hypocrites as Satan would have us believe.

See You in Church,

Pastor Tenney