

Hypocrisy to Humility

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks, James. Good morning, everyone. Nice to see you. My name is James. I've been away for a couple of weeks, so it's wonderful to be back with you. I find hypocrisy really hard to take. My community group this week had a visitor from overseas, and I was attempting to explain the Australian tall poppy syndrome. And I was wondering if it's because we have a history where Australia was founded by criminals and then people doing it tough. And so when we see someone at the very top, we like to cut them down. We like to make them more normal.

And I think this is one of the consequences of what happens in an election cycle like we are in. Our politicians try to pretend like they're normal people. And so they do things like go and cut hair and cook meals and try and make themselves look like everybody else.

But sometimes it can come off as lacking authenticity. It looks like hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is when a person's public life and personal life don't match up. When the public and private life don't match up.

What they present to the world doesn't match up with who they really are. Hypocrisy has caused incredible damage in the church. There's been a whole series of well-known pastors who have had dark secrets revealed. Who they presented themselves to be hasn't matched who they really are behind closed doors. Hypocrisy is a wrecking ball that comes in, smashing souls in its path. In the church, it sees counterfeit shepherds create calloused sheep. Some leave the church, some stop following God, and those who stick around can often be filled with anger and bitterness and distrust. And yet it's not just church leaders or politicians that can cause problems with hypocrisy. Do our private lives and our public lives match up? Does who we really are ever accidentally creep out when we're talking with people and act surprised? Oh, I thought you were the Christian. Why are you speaking like this? I thought

Christians were supposed to forgive people. You don't seem very forgiving right now. We are all tempted to hypocrisy, but we're called to humility. We're all tempted to hide our faults and our problems, but we are called to know who we truly are in Jesus. We are in the book of Romans.

[2 : 5 7] It's a wonderful book filled with deep theological truths. Deep truths that are not always easy to hear. Truths about who we are, about our nature against our God, and the only way to be right with him.

For him to work through the death and resurrection of Jesus to make us right with him. And over the last two weeks, Steve has taken us through that first chapter of Romans. And today we're coming to the second chapter. But these first two chapters of Romans present two ways of responding to God.

It's like the two brothers in the story of the prodigal son. If you remember the story of the prodigal son, the youngest son took half his dad's money. He ran off and he wasted all his dad's money pursuing the pursuits of personal satisfaction, wild living. And the older son was at home, self-righteous, appearing to be the good son judging his younger brother. And so chapter one of Romans speaks to us who are like the younger brother. Those who have run far away from God. Those who've pursued idols of money and sexual satisfaction outside of God's order. Those who have made idols. They are far from God. And now Paul turns to people who are much more like the older brother. Those who appear to be good on the outside, but their own goodness, their own self-righteousness has become their idol.

And so the challenge for us today will be to consider our own hypocrisy. Does our private life match up with our public life? How does the gospel help us to identify our hypocrisy and to grow in humility? So as we jump into Romans 2, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word today. Lord, help us to understand who we are as we stand before you. And help us to know the difference between our public life and our private life so that we would not be hypocrites, Lord. Help us to know who we are before you and how much you have loved us, Lord. Amen. Two points for us this morning, hypocrisy and humility. First of all, we'll start with hypocrisy. Paul starts Romans 2 by turning to those who in his audience thought that they were right before God. Those who would have heard Romans 1 and thought, yes, Paul, yeah, you tell them. You tell all these terrible sinners about how bad they are and about

God's coming wrath and judgment. But now Paul gets the bucket of cold water and he throws it on them and turns to those who thought too much of themselves. And he says, let me just go to see if I can get my clicker to work. Is my clicker working, Wendy? It doesn't look like it's working. There we go. Let me see.

[6 : 06] Okay, that will work. He says, Romans chapter 2. Have your Bibles open with me, brothers and sisters. Romans chapter 2 verse 1. You, you therefore have no excuse. You who pass judgment on someone else.

For at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself. Because you who pass judgment do the same thing. You there who are passing judgment on others, you are condemning yourself. It's that old saying when you point a finger at someone, you've got, you know, three fingers pointing back at you. It's not just saying that sin over there is wrong, but there's the attitude behind it, which is you are lost. You are a sinner. You deserve judgment. And now I feel better about myself because you are far worse than me. To pass judgment is to think others should be judged by God, but not ourselves. Verse 2. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Paul's saying that you're putting yourself in God's shoes when you do this. When you're thinking that it is right for you to judge someone else.

Because at the same time, you are excusing your own sin. Pastor John Stott said of hypocrisy, Wendy, if you can go to the next slide for me.

Thank you, mate. He said, Christian hypocrisy looks like condemning others while we indulge in the same sins.

I'm going to indulge in that same sin because it makes me feel good. But Paul says we're condemning ourselves. God will judge, verse 2, based on truth. Imagine with me that we get to heaven.

[8 : 22] It's a wonderful, exciting day. And we get to God and his judgment. And he takes your phone from you and says, I am going to judge you completely fairly. I will judge you based on how you have judged other people. On the basis of your words and your standards. And he says to your phone, hey Siri, play all hypocrisy. Now I wonder what would happen.

I wonder what would come out of our phones who are with us and those microphones are listening to us at every stage. What is going to come out? How fairly have we judged others compared to ourselves?

How easy it is to condemn others and yet excuse our own sin to make ourselves feel better. The problem with our hypocrisy is that we forget what God has done for us. Paul says in verse 4, Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, his forbearance, his patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Do you forget all of God's forgiveness of you? When you're judging someone else, do you forget how God has forgiven you of the exact same sin? How easy it is for us to look down from our place of lofty judgment, but forget that we're in the exact same place as the person we're judging. Under judgment from God. We can do this comparing ourselves to others to make ourselves feel better. I might have my issues, but at least I'm not as bad as that person over there.

This is the kind of person who comes to church, who believes in God. They do the right things. They appear good on the outside, but ultimately don't act like they need God.

[10 : 23] They're functioning as their own savior and they welcome God's wrath on other people, but see no need to repent themselves. So that's why in verse 4, he calls you to repentance.

He calls us to repentance. But there is no need to repent. They see no need to repent. And so because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you're storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Paul says that those people who think they are righteous are just as sinful, just as idolatrous, just as far from God as those he described in Romans 1. Instead of making idols out of sexual gratification, making idols out of money, they've made themselves God. Instead of repenting, they worship their own goodness. Both of these types of people need God. The religious and the unreligious, the one in church and the one outside of church. I heard of two church pastors in the US who were comparing how hard their jobs were. The first pastor argued that his job was the hardest because he was in the most unreached city in the US. My job is so hard. There are so few Christians here.

The other pastor said, oh, you think your job is hard? I am in the most church city in the US. And so my job is harder because I'm trying to convert the people who are in church, who don't think they need to be saved, who think that they are already good enough.

Hypocrisy is the gap between our personal life and our public life. The people that Paul is describing here are hypocrites. Those who say that they're Christians, those who are appearing on the outside to be doing the right thing and yet not trusting in Jesus. The person who appears in public as if they've got everything together, but they're just minimizing their sin and hiding it in private. The Christian who sins, let me try this again. The Christian hypocrite is not the person who is struggling with their sin. If you're struggling with your sin, you're not necessarily a hypocrite. The person who is struggling with their sin, who confesses their sin, who is calling to God for help, who is asking their community group to be praying for them, that person's not a hypocrite.

[13 : 04] That person is who we want to be, who I want to be. The person who sees their sin and confesses it. The hypocritical Christian is the one who minimizes sin. My sin's actually not that bad.

I can explain it away. It's actually not an issue for me. I could stop my sin at any point. This is an issue I have. I'm a hypocritical Christian. I'll confess that to you, brothers and sisters. I will minimize my sin. I will explain it away. I will explain my sin for these reasons.

Oh, look, I'm tired. It's been a really long day. Do you know what? It's been a really long two years for me, for me personally. COVID's been hard. And so I find it really easy to excuse my sin.

But then I see someone doing the exact same thing, and I think, do you know what? They should know better. I'm not pointing at anybody in particular. I'll point down here. That person, they should know better. Don't they know that Christian should be following God? And do you know what I do? I don't extend the same grace to them. I don't extend the same excuses. I don't extend the same context of the last two years where I will take all of those as excuses for my own sin. Hypocrites don't deny sin.

They minimize it. It's not that bad. We all are sinful before a holy God. We need to be quick to confess.

[14 : 31] Like verse 4 said, to have repentant hearts. Are you quick to confess or to cover up? When you're put on the spot about your sin, do you leap to your own defense?

Proud hearts seek to justify. Repentant hearts acknowledge and confess. So where are you at? Can you feel the heart of a hypocrite beating within you?

Let me ask a couple of questions. Do you feel deep down that you are a hopeless sinner? That God has the perfect right to cast you off at any second? Do you judge others?

When you look at others, do you shake your head and judge in your heart? Or do you think, I'm just like them. My sin is just a different type of sin, but I'm exactly the same as that person.

Or do you think you can stand on your own at the coming judgment? When good God pulls out your phone of life and goes through all your hypocrisy? Or have you accepted that you are totally dependent on God's grace?

[15 : 45] And you're given a standing before him that we can't earn. So what do we do then? If we feel this beating heart of hypocrisy within us?

Well, Paul helps. Paul helps us in Romans chapter 2. But first, he's going to sharpen his words towards his audience from verse 17. And I wonder if I add in a slight translation to modernize it for us today, as if Paul was writing this to us, I wonder if this would help.

So have a look with me at the next slide at verse 17. Thank you, Wendy. Now you, if you call yourself a Jew or a Christian, if you rely on the law and boast in God, you know, you've signed a commitment card, you've walked down the front of church, you prayed a prayer, you became a Christian.

If you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law, you've been to Sunday school, you've been in church for years, you're in a community group, you've memorized verses of the Bible, you know some theology, you love to read books on the Bible.

If you're convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, maybe you actually lead as part of our Next Gen ministry, or you lead a community group, or you're serving here today because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

[17 : 07] Oh, over the next slide. Thank you, Wendy. The end of the next slide. You know all there is to know. This is a pretty comprehensive list. I think this includes most of us here today.

Paul gets to the point, you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? Do you consider yourself? What is the Bible saying to me?

Are you hearing God speaking and not thinking, oh, this part of the Bible is for somebody else? Have you been reading the Bible, working toward a regular time with God, but nothing in your life has actually changed?

Do you sit with God, reading His Word and say, this is me. I see me in this. God's actually talking about me. Oh God, I need you.

Are we actually practicing what we preach? Verse 21. Verse 21. That's not verse 21. Let me read verse 21.

[18 : 10] You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

Are you allowing what you judge others to judge yourself? Preach to yourself before others. True gospel living looks into our hearts and not down on others.

Often after church, I'll have lots of different conversations about the sermon and about the part of the Bible we've been looking at. Often it's details about the sermon, details about the passage.

You know, this part of the Bible is really interesting. What does this mean? I've only touched on a couple of different parts of Romans 2 and so there's often some good questions about the other parts that I haven't touched on.

And these are good conversations. conversations. But my favorite conversations, the very best feedback for a preacher is when someone says, when you said this, that's me.

[19 : 15] What you were talking about in the Bible, that's what I struggle with. They've looked at God's word and they're not judging others. They're not just interested, but they see themselves in the Bible and God convicts them.

Paul closes his chapter with a discussion about circumcision. Circumcision was the symbol of faith for the Jew, those who were God's people.

But they began to depend on the symbol of faith and not the God who was the place where their faith was to be in. Paul says the symbol itself is worthless.

Verse 28. The next slide. Thanks, Wendy. A person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly.

And circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God. Circumcision, not to dwell on it for too long, is a cutting off of a very intimate part.

[20 : 26] And so what God is saying to Abraham, who he initially gave this sign to, was if you want a relationship with me, you need to be circumcised as a sign to you and everyone else, that if you break this covenant, you will be completely cut off.

If you break this covenant, you will be completely cut off. But no one keeps the covenant. No Jew has kept the covenant. So they all have to be cut off.

And this is why Jesus comes. The one on the cross, the one who is cut off from God on the cross, the one who takes the penalty of our hypocrisy and our sin, so that we could have the symbol, not in the flesh, but in the spirit, in our hearts.

And so Paul closes with some radical words. The person who trusts in the Jesus who was cut off, that person's praise is not from other people, but from God.

When we trust in Jesus, we don't need to seek praise for ourself. We get praise from God. The challenge of hypocrisy for our human hearts is that we want praise.

[21 : 46] We want approval. We crave it. We're living in a cancel culture world, and so there's a fear of being cancelled, and there's this desire for praise. I must know I'm in the right.

And so we minimize our issues. You know, I'm sure every celebrity's gone through their Twitter history and made sure they delete any radical, controversial thing.

We minimize our issues, we hide our sins, and we pretend so that we can get praise from people around us. They don't really know how bad we are, and so we are allowed to continue to fit into society.

We want approval. We want to know we're living the right way. We want the pat on the head. The hypocritical heart creates a false approval of its own.

My heart says, yes, James, you're fine. All those other, again, I'm not pointing at any of you, all those other people, they're all far worse than you. You're doing a good job. You've actually got it all together.

[22 : 48] But the humble heart, the one circumcised by God, who knows that if it wasn't for Jesus, they would be cut off, that heart knows that their praise comes from God.

Can you imagine praise from God, brothers and sisters, standing before God on the day of judgment, and he says, well done, good and faithful servant. You trusted in Jesus, not yourself.

Hypocrisy is the wrecking ball that hangs around our head, threatening to explode through our lives and smash our families, our communities, and our church.

But humility, looking at God's word, seeing who we are, and yet how much we are loved by God, that humility seal is real relationships built on Jesus.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word today. We thank you for Paul's directness to us.

[23 : 57] Lord, we ask that we would not be people who minimize our sin or hide it away as if we could make it smaller and therefore somehow stand before you on the day of judgment.

Lord, we thank you for Jesus, that he is the one who was cut off so we could be brought in. Lord, help us to look to him, to desire not to hide our sin, but to praise you that it has been dealt with.

So that we can confess, knowing that you love us. Lord, help us be quick to confess and not to hide our sin, knowing that our righteousness comes from you, Lord.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.