

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Growth Environment For Love: An Unhypocritical Faith

by Dan Trygg

"...the goal... is love out from a clean heart, and a good conscience, and unhyprocritical faith."

I Timothy 1:5

"...giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, ...in love without pretention..."

II Corinthians 6:3,4,6b

"Having purified yourselves by the obedience of the truth toward an unpretentious mutual love, out from clean hearts love one another earnestly."

I Peter 1:22

Hypocrisy. It is a characteristic **universally despised and distasteful** to everybody. **Jesus hated it**, and severely reprovod the Pharisees for their participation in it. He talked about it twenty-three times in the gospels, ...sixteen times in Matthew's account alone, which was directed more to the Jewish people who were entrenched in religious traditions deeply infected with this sickness. Of the eleven remaining times the concept is addressed in the New Testament, two describe a past event (Gal. 2:13), one describes a characteristic of some who will depart from the faith in the "latter times" (I Tim. 4:2), one is an admonition to put it aside in order to grow effectively as a believer (I Pet. 2:1), and another is a warning to avoid getting entrapped in it by saying more than what one should say (Jas. 5:12). The remaining six times are actually negated forms of the word, like "unhyprocritical" would be in English. They occur in relation to faith (I Tim. 1:5; II Tim. 1:5), love (Rom. 12:9; II Cor. 6:6; I Pet. 1:22), and wisdom (Jas. 3:17).

This strong negative message about hypocrisy is not without warrant. It is in direct contradiction to the character of the God we serve, Who is Himself incapable of deceit (Heb. 6:18), and who says He desires truth and integrity in those who worship Him (Psa. 51:6; Jn. 4:23), **it is incredibly damaging to the advance and effectiveness of His kingdom in this world. Hypocrisy remains one of the most powerful reasons that people give for not being interested in Christianity.** Beyond the negative impression it may give of the effectiveness of Christianity, however, **it is also a key factor that keeps us as individuals from advancing in our own spiritual growth.**

What really is hypocrisy? The Greek word means "to pretend, to act a part (as an actor), to make believe, to assume a counterfeit character". It is **pretense**. It means to act in a way that is different from what you really are, especially to impress others, or hide your real self from others. It means to be phony, instead of genuine. In the history of the word in Greek, it was first commonly employed to describe the role of a professional actor, who would deliver a speech, along with interpretive gestures in order to imitate the persona of the character in the play. The word later was used to describe the way in which people in general are false, pretentious, or "put on a front". **The primary motivation is to be liked or respected by others.** The underlying fear is that if we were honest and "real", we would be rejected or overlooked. In Jesus' comments on the trap of hypocrisy, He warned of doing things "in order to be seen by people" (Matt. 6:2,5,16). Impressing others, winning or keeping their acceptance, or attempting to manipulate and influence them by what appears to be a very strong and good exterior are the reasons we tend to "put on a show". Think about it. If we were not concerned about what others thought, why would we pretend to be different than we really are? It takes a lot of energy to create and maintain a persona. Why do it, if we are not trying to impress someone, i.e., others, God, or even ourselves? **Pretentious** is a good English synonym for this aspect of hypocrisy, because it **includes both the idea of pretending** (i.e., of putting on a show), **along with the idea of trying to magnify oneself** in order to impress others.

What, then, does it mean to be "unhyprocritical"? Sometimes we err in assuming that the opposite of being false and phony is just to tell the truth, i.e., to be "transparent". Unfortunately, being transparent only addresses part of the problem. It is possible to be transparent, and still be overselling oneself. You can get into telling everyone around you just what is going on inside of you, and still make yourself the center of attention. You can attempt to impress others with your ruthless and direct self-revelations, whether you know it or not. Besides being honest, there is also a need to dial down the drive to get acceptance from others. If we cannot be comfortable within ourselves, the subtle tendrils of hypocrisy will begin to grow up in other ways. Our "truth-telling" is easily transformed by our selection of what to tell, how we tell it, and to whom we reveal it, into another method of "getting noticed" (...in order to be seen by men"). **No, transparency is not the negation of hypocrisy. Genuine humility is.** There is a false humility which must also be guarded against, an avoidance of positive attention which is the result of hurtful experiences and twisted messages from the past, as well. A false humility can be an unhealthy survival technique, ...a more subtle hypocrisy, in that it pretends to be *less* than what is real, in order to get approval, or to avoid pain. Genuine humility, on the other hand, is able to put down *both* the walls of deception *and* the drive for self-affirmation, and to be honest, contented, and at rest within. It is truly un-pretend-tious.

What was going on in I Timothy? Why were people teaching strange doctrines, or getting into speculations, or, ...turning aside from living out simple, humble *agapē*..., why were they getting involved in fruitless discussions? It seems that **these people had a drive to be noticed, to be in the limelight, to have their opinion respected by others, so they were putting themselves forward, when they really did not know what they are talking about.**

What does all this mean for me? **What does it mean to have "unpretentious faith"?** An unpretentious, or unhyprocritical, faith is a **belief or trust that is down-to-earth, real, and not pretending to be something it is not, ...nor to reach out beyond itself.** Think again about the Pharisees, and how their faith worked out in some of their religious practices. Much of what they did was to be seen by men. Much of what they did was a personal outward religious show. Their true heart was revealed by their arrogant pride, their self-importance, their lack of charity and concern for others, and the way that they manipulated their religious system to their own interests (e.g., Matt. 15:1-14). Contrast that with the life of Jesus, or the early church, and you begin to see the difference quite clearly.

Jesus was not "holier-than-thou", even though He was the most holy person to ever walk the planet. His faith was a practical, serving, reaching-to-the-lowliest kind of belief system that motivated Him to walk and work among the common people, not to lift Himself above them. This kind of humility was a mark of the early church, as they reached out in practical ways to the poor and powerless of their society. There was **no contradiction between what they said they believed, and what they did.** They walked their talk in practical, loving ways that were consistent with what they taught about God, and about Body-life. There was no "putting on a show" of religion, because their beliefs *were* their life, ...not just a religious compartment to be visited at their convenience. They, unlike the Pharisees, wore no religious costumes, bore no special titles of importance, sounded no trumpets to get peoples' attention. This constant contact with people in need gave rise to compassion in their hearts, and the fruit of true concern and love evidenced in practical deeds.

Why is this a necessary ingredient for *agapē* love? Just as we see with the example of these early believers, only if we can put aside the selfish motivation that drives us to pretend, can we be open to really see the needs of those around us. Furthermore, if we stop trying to put ourselves, or our beliefs, forward in an inappropriate manner, we can be open to the simple leading of the Spirit to serve in practical ways. If we are "promoting self", we are more concerned with convincing others of *our* goodness than we are really interested in *their* needs. The essential nature of *agapē* is to willingly sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of others. We cannot do that if we are secretly interested in promoting self. At some point, we will withhold true love, and give something that is less. If *agapē* is to willingly honor and prefer others before self, yet we want to preserve the self-interest of "looking good", then we will either be unable to give ourselves completely in the celebration of honoring others, or we will somehow want to draw attention to ourselves along with these others. The pretense of self-interest and self-promotion, however subtle, will be like the fly in the ointment, and will be detectable.

The real key is to know inside that we are important, valued, capable, ...people of dignity and worth..., so that we do not have to pretend to impress anybody. God has made us so in Christ. We are to walk with integrity in the light of *that* truth, and the light of His presence. If we have a clean heart, and a good conscience, then we can have an unhyprocritical faith from which love can grow. Ultimately, self-striving can only cease when we enter into the "sabbath rest" of grace (Heb. 4:9-11). **At the root of hypocrisy is the fear of man. Until we come to where we are no longer striving for approval from others, we will tend to want to hide behind a mask of appearances.**

If we just make a "show of religion", or if we "**religify**" everything with slogans, formulas, religious rituals, ceremonial prayers, we can easily fall into the trap of hypocrisy, e.g., of saying to the poor, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet not give them what is necessary for their body..." As James says, "What use is *that*?" (Jas. 2:14-16). **Faith that is genuine has the fruit of action. Hypocritical faith says one thing, but does another.** It makes an outward show of righteousness, but has no real, practical fruits of righteousness to show for itself. Faith without works is dead. It is phony. It makes a claim, but does not follow through. Thus **it is critical that we avoid any "showmanship"**, any parading of our spirituality before others in order to be seen by them (cf. Matt. 6:1-18). **Jesus' teaching about keeping things secret**, so that only God and I know what I am really doing in the outworking of my faith, **undercuts this motivation to impress others, and keeps us genuine.**

Finally, we need to be very vigilant about what we say, being careful to fulfill whatever we say that we will do. Psalm 15 declares that the one who may abide with God is the one "who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart" (vs. 2), and who "swears to his own hurt, and does not change" (vs. 4b). James 4:13-15 admonishes us not to claim or promise things that we do not have the power to deliver on. This caution to not "bite off more than we can chew" keeps us humble and dependent upon God. "In many words there is much transgression" was the observation of Solomon in Proverbs 10:19. **We can avoid hypocrisy by being cognizant of, and honest about, our limitations and weaknesses.** Humble openness will have the effect of taking off the mask of hypocrisy, so that there can be no false pride or "showmanship". Instead, we *are* as we *appear*.