
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***What should be done about hypocrites in the church?***

ATTITUDES ABOUT HYPOCRITES

First let me say a word about attitudes which people have about hypocrites.

1) Some refuse to come to church because there are people there whom they consider to be hypocrites.

These people figure that the worse thing they could do would be to rub elbows with a hypocrite at church. The interesting thing is that refusal to associate with hypocrites applies only to religious matters and to nothing else. For example, how many people refuse to go to the grocery store, because there are hypocrites in the store pretending they're in that store to buy groceries, when really they came to see a friend who works at the store? Or how many people refuse to go to work because there are hypocrites there pretending that they enjoy their jobs when really they would rather be out fishing? How many times have wives gone to baseball games and hypocritically acted as though they enjoyed being there? And yet, does anyone refuse to go to ball games because there are hypocrites in the stadium?

But church is different. If there's someone present who is considered to be a hypocrite, people use that as an excuse for not going to worship God.

2) Some use hypocrites as a comparison for their own lives in order to make themselves feel better.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm just as good as John Doe and he goes to church." When people compare themselves to others like this, they always choose a hypocrite to compare themselves to. They choose the weakest member of the congregation, or the worst example and use that person as a comparison for their own selves. But in all honesty, suppose a person was just as good as a hypocrite in the church? Is there any comfort in that idea? All this could

possibly mean is that they would receive the same fate as the hypocrite. There doesn't seem to be any consolation whatsoever in the idea that I could be just as good as a hypocrite.

2 Corinthians 10:12

¹² For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

This passage clearly indicates that we should not be using others as a standard by which to measure our own lives. When we compare ourselves to others we are using an unreliable standard.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

But what should be done about hypocrites in the church? Is there anything that can be done? The Bible gives some indication of what can be done in some cases.

1) If someone in the congregation sins against you personally, there is a remedy for this.

Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁵ "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

¹⁶ "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

¹⁷ "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

This is the Lord's solution to personal conflict. If a fellow Christian sins against you personally, you are to go to that person and attempt to resolve the problem alone. If that fails, take one or two other Christians along and try again. If the second attempt fails, bring the matter before the entire church. If there is still no repentance, the offender is to be excommunicated.

Often times, if there are really hypocrites in the church, it's because someone failed to deal with them after the prescribed fashion which the Lord gave in this passage.

2) If someone in the congregation lives an immoral life, there is a remedy for this.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

⁹ I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

¹⁰ Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; not even to eat with such a person.

¹² For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

¹³ But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

From this passage we learn several things about how to deal with Christians who are living hypocritical lives.

First, realize that this passage is speaking about Christians, members of the church. These regulations do not apply to non-Christians.

Second, this passage gives a specific list of sins to watch for and to deal with. If a Christian is guilty of one of these specific sins (fornication, covetousness, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, or extortion), then we are to excommunicate them.

Third, these people that are excommunicated are not to be associated with. We are not to eat with them -- either a common meal, or the communion.

3) If someone in the congregation is not working and not minding their own business, there is a remedy for this.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10

⁶ But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

⁹ not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

This passage is speaking specifically about a Christian who has become a "mooch." They refuse to work and mind their own business. These people are to be withdrawn from. We should not associate with them and it is the church's responsibility to withdraw from these people.

In summary, if the church would do its part and follow these instructions of the Lord, there would be less hypocrisy in the church. On the other hand, just because there are hypocrites in the church, this does not mean we will go to heaven if we stay away from church and neglect our duties toward God. If someone is truly a hypocrite, let them go to hell alone. It would be better to go to church and be with a hypocrite for one hour a week than to be lost and spend eternity with him in hell.

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