

The Difference Between a Hypocrite and a Good Person Making a Mistake

By Clarence Johnson

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:8-9). This passage clearly shows that no one is sinlessly perfect, but it does not brand all as hypocrites. The word hypocrite comes from a Greek word meaning "play actor." The word denotes one who either 1) pretends to be something he is not, or 2) pretends to believe something he does not really believe. That fact that a person sins does not prove him to be a hypocrite devoid of conviction. Good people sin and make mistakes. We illustrate our point from several incidents from the life of Simon Peter.

1. Good people make mistakes in judgment. After being with Jesus day and night for three and a half years in preparation to fish for men, Peter contemplated going back to fishing for fish (John 21:3-17). Choosing one's occupation is a matter of judgment, but in this case, Peter was using extremely poor -- perhaps sinful judgment.

2. Good people sometimes make careless mistakes. Numbers 35:23 pictures a scene where a man brought harm another in an unguarded moment, by not being careful. Many auto accidents and similar matters fall into this category. Even though such carelessness may be sinful, it seldom involves hypocrisy.

3. Good people make mistakes through ignorance. No one has all knowledge; therefore, we are subject to make mistakes that would be avoided if we were better informed. And sometimes our ignorance stems, not from being uninformed but by being misinformed. Sometimes we know things that aren't true. Peter was there when Jesus gave the great commission "to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." But Peter (and evidently the other apostles as well) assumed that Jesus meant every Jewish creature. After all, they knew they were not to associate with Gentiles (Acts 10:28). And even though the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to preach that the gospel promises were to you (Jews) and to your children, and to all who are afar off (the Gentiles, Eph. 2:17), neither Peter nor the other apostles fully understood that until after the events of Acts 10 and 11. Had they known sooner, they would have preached to Gentiles sooner. Their failure to carry out that part of the commission was not due to hypocrisy, but to their failure to completely understand. The sins of Saul of Tarsus against the early church were prompted by a similar lack of understanding. He did it ignorantly in unbelief (1Tim. 1:13).

4. Good people sin through the weakness of the flesh. Peter's denial of Jesus was such a sin. Peter succumbed to the fear and/or shame that attached itself to Jesus' crucifixion (Matt. 26:65-74). What Peter did was a sin, but it was not a deliberate sham. He was a good man, making a mistake through weakness of the flesh (Matt. 26:41).

These things are not said to excuse sin. Sin is still sin, and it must be confessed and forsaken. But let us take care that we do not brand one as a hypocrite simply because he has erred. Though the good person will make mistakes, he will also acknowledge his sins, and God is "faithful and just to forgive" his sins. The blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse him from all sin and unrighteousness. The hypocrite will insist that he has not sinned, that he has been misunderstood, or that someone else is really at fault. He thus relinquishes the benefit of having an Advocate with the Father, by denying his need for such (1John 1:8 - 2:6).

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1John 1:8-10).

Confirming the Constitution

"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mark 16:20). There are many today who claim to have the supernatural gifts of tongues and healings. This cannot be true, because the purpose of the miraculous gifts in that early age was to "confirm" the word of God. The word "confirm" means to "establish...to prove its (the word's) truth and divinity" (Thayer, p. 99).

The U.S. Constitution was confirmed, Sept. 17, 1787, by the signatures of George Washington and 38 other statesmen. That document was confirmed over 200 years ago, and no one can reconfirm (re-sign) it today.

Just as our nation stands on the foundation of the Constitution, the church of our Lord is founded on the New Testament. Both documents were confirmed in their beginning. The very nature of "confirming" takes place at its beginning and not throughout its existence. The miraculous gifts of the first century are to the New Testament what the signatures of the fathers are to our Constitution, and neither can be duplicated or reproduced today.

Prayer and Baseball

A man sat next to a minister during a baseball game and talked religion. A fellow came up to bat who bowed his head in prayer, and then hit the ball out of the park. His next time at bat, he uttered a prayer and hit another homer. Amazed, the man asked the preacher, "Does prayer always work out there like that?"

"It does," the preacher answered, "if you can hit the ball."

Prayer isn't a substitute for work or practice. But prayer is a support for these things. It was Augustine who said, "Pray as though everything depended on God, and work as though everything depended on you."

"Much Obligated, Lord, For My Vittles."

Thankfulness leaves no room for discouragement. "I once read a legend of a man who found the barn where Satan kept his seeds of sin ready to be sown in the human heart, and on finding that the seeds of discouragement more numerous than all the others, he learned that those seeds could be grown almost anywhere. When Satan was questioned, he reluctantly admitted that there was one place in which he could never get them to grow... 'In the heart of a grateful man.'" (V. Norskov Olsen, President, Loma Linda University)

Fulton Oursler tells of his old nurse, who was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland and who attended the birth of his mother and his own birth. She taught him the greatest lesson in giving thanks and finding contentment. "I remember her as she sat at the kitchen table in our house; the hard, old, brown hands folded across her starched apron, the glistening eyes, and the husky old whispering voice, saying, 'Much obligated, Lord, for my vittles.' 'Anna,' I asked, what's a vittle?' 'It's what I've got to eat and drink, that vittles,' she answered. 'But,' I protested, 'you'd get your vittles whether you thanked the Lord or not.' 'Sure, she said, 'but it makes everything taste better to be thankful.'"

The Safest Place to Be

Do not ride in an car; they cause 20% of all fatal accidents.

Do not stay at home; 17% of all accidents happen there.

Do not walk in the street; 15% of all accidents happen to pedestrians.

Do not travel by air, rail or water; 16% of all accidents result from these activities.

Only .001% of all accidents happen in the church building. Therefore the safest place to be on: Sunday AM at 9:30, Sunday PM at 6:00, and Wednesday PM at 7:00 is right here at TR! (Adapted from The Joyful Noiseletter, Sept - Oct 1988, via Creators Syndicate)

A Moments Wisdom

--The atheist has to look at Spring bursting forth and try real hard not to think about God.

--A smile is the shortest distance between two people.

--Procrastination is the fertilizer that makes difficulties grow.

--Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship.