



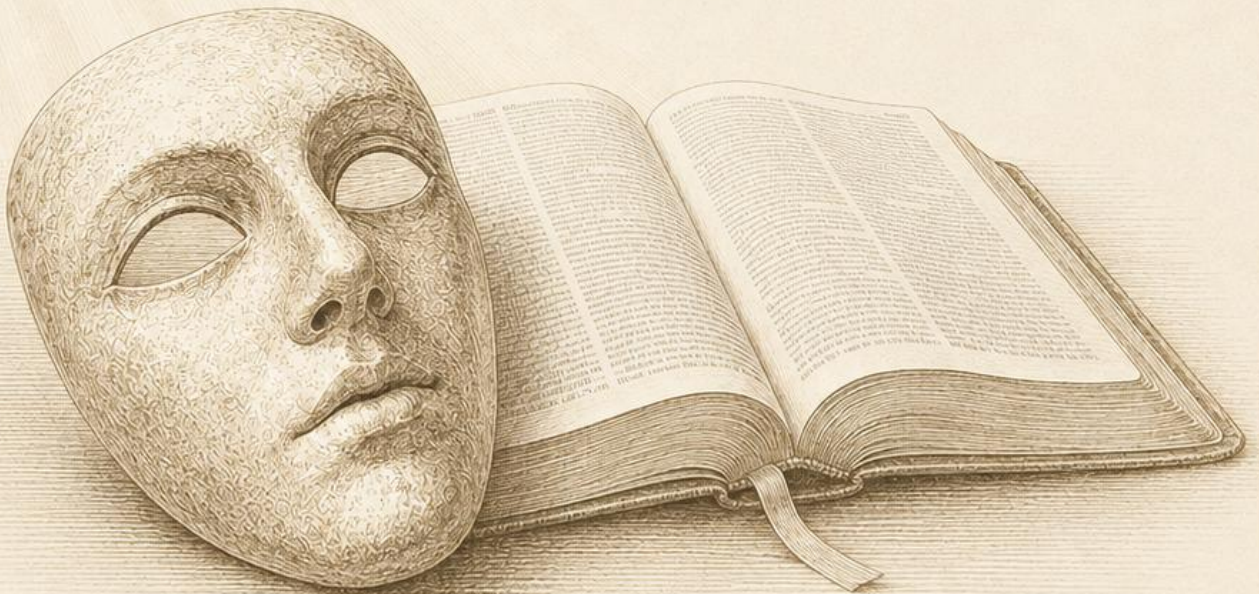
REASON TOGETHER CHURCH



THE MASK

What did Jesus mean when He called
someone a hypocrite?

Matthew 6:1–18 KJV



Sermon & Pastor's Commentary

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

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Aloha, church family.

And aloha to everyone joining us through our online ministry.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we are going to ask a question that most of us think we already know how to answer.

What did Jesus mean when He called someone a hypocrite?

Our title is simply, "The Mask."

Most of us know what a mask does.

A mask presents one face while concealing another.

It allows a person to appear to be someone he is not.

And the strange thing about a mask is that the people looking at it may eventually forget that there is another face underneath.

Sometimes even the person wearing it may forget.

When we hear the word hypocrite, we usually think of someone who says one thing and does another.

We think of someone who is two-faced.

We think of someone who acts one way at church and another way at home.

There is truth in that understanding.

But when Jesus spoke about hypocrisy, He revealed something even deeper.

He showed us that hypocrisy can turn religion into a stage.

Good works become the performance.

Other people become the audience.

Human praise becomes the reward.

And the person performing the part may become more concerned about protecting the appearance than becoming right with God.

Before we go any farther, let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, thank You for allowing us to gather around Your Word.

Thank You that Your Word does not merely show us what is wrong with the world around us.

It also searches our own hearts.

Lord, help us not to use this message to examine the person sitting beside us.

Help us not to think first of a politician, a preacher, a family member or someone who has disappointed us.

Give us the courage to look honestly at ourselves.

Show us where performance has replaced worship.

Show us where reputation has become more important than repentance.

Show us where we have wanted the applause of people more than the approval of our heavenly Father.

And if we discover a mask, give us the grace and courage to remove it.

Speak to us through Your Word today.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Our primary Scripture is Matthew chapter 6.

We will begin with verse 1.

Jesus said:

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men.

Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are:

for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret;

and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do:

for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them:

for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance:

for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret:

and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

Before we examine those words, this is a fitting place for our giving note.

Reason Together Church does not pass a plate.

We do not want giving to become a public performance or a source of pressure.

If you are visiting with us, please do not feel any obligation to give.

Any donations or love gifts are greatly appreciated, but they are never required to visit the church or to download any of our free online studies.

Giving is an act of worship between the giver and the Lord.

God sees every sincere gift, including the gifts no one else ever hears about.

If you are visiting today, we also have a simple guest card.

We ask only for your first name and email address.

We will not single you out or embarrass you.

We would simply like to remain connected with you.

And after our service, everyone is invited to the Reason Together Café for locally grown coffee and conversation.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversations.

There is no need to pretend in this room.

Bring your questions.

Bring your struggles.

Bring the person you really are.

Now let us return to our question.

What did Jesus mean when He called someone a hypocrite?

The easiest thing to do with a sermon about hypocrisy is to think about someone else.

Most of us can picture someone before the sermon is finished.

Maybe we remember a church leader whose private conduct contradicted his public message.

Maybe we remember a person who spoke kindly in one room and cruelly in another.

Maybe someone used spiritual words to manipulate us.

Maybe someone condemned a sin in public while secretly practicing it.

Hypocrisy wounds people.

Religious hypocrisy can wound them especially deeply because it uses the name of God to support a false appearance.

Some people have said, “I do not go to church because the church is full of hypocrites.”

We should never pretend that hypocrisy does not exist among religious people.

Jesus did not pretend it did not exist.

No one spoke more forcefully against religious hypocrisy than Jesus Christ.

In Matthew chapter 23, He repeatedly declared:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

Christianity does not defend hypocrisy.

Christ exposed it.

Christ condemned it.

But there is a danger when we hear those words.

We may use the Word of God as a window through which we study everybody outside.

James tells us that the Word is also a mirror.

A mirror is not designed to help me examine the face of the person standing behind me.

It is designed to show me my own face.

So before we point toward somebody else's mask, we need to ask what the Word of God is showing us about our own.

The Greek word translated "hypocrite" carried the idea of someone playing a part or performing a role.

It was associated with an actor.

Our English word hypocrisy came to describe pretense because an actor presents himself as someone he is not.

The actor speaks words that may not be his own.

He shows emotions required by the scene.

He adopts the identity demanded by the part.

The picture of a mask helps us understand that performance.

But I want to be accurate.

The Greek word does not simply mean "a man wearing a mask."

The mask is our visual illustration.

The Biblical force is pretense, performance and playing a part.

The hypocrite turns life into a stage.

Religion becomes the costume.

Good works become the performance.

Other people become the audience.

And their applause becomes the reward.

The spiritual mask says, "Believe that I am more righteous than I really am."

"Believe that I am closer to God than I really am."

"Notice the part that I am showing you, but please do not look beneath it."

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus identifies three good things that can be turned into religious theater.

He speaks about giving.

He speaks about praying.

He speaks about fasting.

None of these practices was sinful.

Jesus did not tell His disciples to stop giving.

He did not tell them to stop praying.

He did not tell them to stop fasting.

He warned them about performing those practices “to be seen of men.”

That phrase takes us to the heart of the message.

The problem was not simply that someone happened to see the good work.

The problem was that being seen had become the reason for doing it.

Jesus begins with giving.

He said not to sound a trumpet as the hypocrites did in the synagogues and in the streets.

Whether we understand that trumpet as a literal practice or as a vivid picture, the meaning is unmistakable.

They made sure their generosity received attention.

The gift might have helped someone.

The hungry person may still have eaten.

The poor person may still have received assistance.

But the giver was not concerned only with meeting the need.

He was also building a reputation.

He wanted witnesses.

He wanted people to say, “What a generous man.”

He wanted the gift to purchase something for himself.

It purchased public admiration.

That leads us to a question we will ask throughout this message.

If no one except your heavenly Father knew you had done it, would you still do it?

If no one knew you gave the money, would you still give it?

If your name never appeared on a list, would you still help?

If the recipient could never thank you, would you still meet the need?

There is nothing automatically wrong with public accountability.

A church should handle funds honestly and transparently.

There may be legitimate reasons for other people to know that a gift was given.

The question is not merely whether the gift was visible.

The question is whether visibility was the real reward the heart desired.

A person can place money in someone else's hand while reaching for applause with his own heart.

Jesus then turns from giving to prayer.

He said:

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are.”

They loved to pray standing in prominent places so they could be seen.

Again, public prayer is not automatically hypocritical.

Jesus prayed where people could hear Him.

The early church prayed together.

We pray together in this service.

Public prayer is Biblical.

But prayer can quietly acquire a second audience.

The words may be grammatically addressed to God while the heart is performing for everybody listening.

A prayer may become a demonstration of vocabulary.

It may become a display of Biblical knowledge.

It may become a way to sound more spiritual than someone else.

It may even become a way of correcting another person without speaking directly to him.

Have you ever heard a prayer that seemed to contain a message for everyone except God?

That is a danger in public prayer.

The mouth says, “Our Father,” but the heart is asking, “How do I sound?”

Jesus directed His disciples to the private place.

Enter the closet.

Shut the door.

Pray to the Father who is in secret.

There is no congregation in that room.

There is no one to compliment the prayer afterward.

There is no one to notice how long it lasted.

There is no one to admire the words.

There is only the child and the Father.

The private prayer life reveals whether we love speaking with God or merely love being heard speaking about God.

So we ask the question again.

If no one except your heavenly Father ever heard the prayer, would you still pray it?

What we do alone with God often reveals more about our spiritual life than what we do before an entire congregation.

Then Jesus speaks about fasting.

Fasting was another legitimate act of devotion.

The hypocrites, however, altered their appearance so others would recognize their sacrifice.

Jesus said they were of a sad countenance.

They disfigured their faces so they might appear unto men to fast.

Their discomfort became part of the costume.

Their sacrifice required publicity.

They did not merely want to deny themselves before God.

They wanted other people to notice what they were denying themselves.

Jesus told His disciples to anoint the head and wash the face.

In other words, continue looking ordinary.

Do not advertise the sacrifice.

Allow the Father to be the One who sees it.

And we ask the same question again.

If no one except your heavenly Father knew what you had sacrificed, would you still sacrifice it?

Giving, praying and fasting look different on the outside.

But Jesus exposed the same desire underneath all three performances.

“I want someone to see me.”

Now we come to one of the most interesting tensions in this passage.

In Matthew chapter 5, verse 16, Jesus said:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

But in Matthew chapter 6, verse 1, He said:

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them.”

In one place, Jesus says to let people see your good works.

In the next place, Jesus warns you not to perform good works in order to be seen.

Is that a contradiction?

No.

The difference is the destination of the glory.

In Matthew 5, people see the good work and glorify the Father.

In Matthew 6, people see the performance and glorify the performer.

In Matthew 5, the light points beyond us to the Father.

In Matthew 6, the spotlight stops on us.

That is the difference.

Being seen is not always avoidable.

Wanting to be seen is the danger Jesus identified.

You may serve in a ministry where everyone knows what you are doing.

You may pray publicly because you were asked to lead the congregation.

You may share a testimony because it will encourage someone.

You may post Scripture online because you sincerely want others to encounter the Word of God.

You may be recognized for years of faithful service.

None of those things automatically makes you a hypocrite.

The searching question is why.

Why did I do it?

What response did I hope to receive?

Would I still have obeyed if no one had noticed?

Did the work direct attention toward my heavenly Father, or did it quietly construct a spotlight for me?

Jesus is not commanding us to hide every good work.

He is commanding us not to use good works to advertise ourselves.

After describing each performance, Jesus repeats a sobering sentence.

“They have their reward.”

That does not mean they received nothing.

They received exactly what they wanted.

They wanted recognition.

They received recognition.

They wanted admiration.
They received admiration.
They wanted people to speak well of them.
People spoke well of them.
The transaction was complete.
The applause was the payment.
But human applause is a small and temporary reward.
It lasts only as long as the audience remains.
It lasts only as long as the performance continues.
It lasts only as long as the reputation survives.
It lasts only until someone else steps into the spotlight.
One of the tragedies of living for approval is that the audience is always changing.
The same people who applaud today may criticize tomorrow.
The crowd that praises one part may reject the next.
If our identity depends upon applause, we will spend our lives adjusting the performance.
We will say yes in one room and no in another.
We will display one conviction to this group and conceal it from that group.
We may eventually have so many versions of ourselves that we no longer know which one is real.
Are we exchanging the eternal approval of God for applause that ends before we leave the room?
The praise of people is not always wrong.
It can be encouraging when someone notices faithful service.
But it is a terribly small reward when it becomes the reason for our obedience.
At this point, we need to make a very important distinction.
Imperfection is not automatically hypocrisy.
Every Christian fails.
Every Christian has experienced a difference between what he believes and how he has sometimes behaved.
We lose our temper even though we believe in kindness.
We speak carelessly even though we know the power of words.
We neglect prayer even though we believe prayer matters.

We yield to temptation even though we sincerely desire to obey God.

If every failure were hypocrisy, every believer would be nothing but a hypocrite every moment of his life.

But the Bible distinguishes between struggling with sin and hiding behind a spiritual mask.

The struggling believer acknowledges the sin.

He brings it before God.

He asks for forgiveness.

He desires restoration.

He gets up and continues walking with Christ.

The hypocrite protects the appearance.

He conceals the truth.

He excuses the sin.

He maintains the performance.

He becomes more concerned about what people will think than about what God already knows.

Peter failed terribly when he denied Jesus.

He said that he did not know Him.

That contradicted everything Peter claimed to believe.

But when the rooster crowed and Peter realized what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly.

His failure was real.

So was his repentance.

David committed grievous sins.

He tried for a time to conceal what he had done.

But when Nathan confronted him, David said:

“I have sinned against the LORD.”

Psalm 51 opens the heart of a man who stopped defending the image and confessed the truth.

The publican in Luke chapter 18 would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven.

He smote upon his breast and prayed:

“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

He did not offer God a performance.

He offered God the truth.

The struggling Christian brings his failure to God.

The hypocrite hides his failure behind the mask.

Please do not hear this sermon and conclude that every inconsistency proves you are a fraud.

The fact that you are troubled by your sin may be evidence that the Spirit of God is working in you.

The issue is what you do when the truth is revealed.

Do you confess it?

Do you seek forgiveness?

Do you make things right where possible?

Or do you become angry because someone noticed the crack in the mask?

God can forgive the sin we confess.

The mask becomes dangerous when it convinces us that there is nothing to confess.

That helps us understand why Jesus spoke so severely in Matthew chapter 23.

He compared the scribes and Pharisees to a cup that was clean on the outside but filthy within.

He compared them to whited sepulchres.

On the outside, the sepulchre appeared beautiful.

Inside, it was filled with dead men's bones and uncleanness.

Jesus said:

“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

The outward appearance was not simply incomplete.

It was being used to conceal the inward reality.

Religious hypocrisy is dangerous because it misrepresents God.

It deceives other people.

It burdens those who are sincerely seeking truth.

It allows reputation to replace repentance.

It can cause a wounded person to confuse the behavior of someone wearing a religious mask with the character of Jesus Christ.

That is one reason Jesus spoke with such severity.

Religion can become an especially convincing costume.

A person can learn the vocabulary.

He can carry the right Bible.

He can occupy the right seat.

He can know when to say amen.

He can hold a position.

He can present an appearance that persuades everyone except the God who sees the heart.

At Reason Together Church, some people may come wearing a suit and tie.

Others may come in shorts and a Hawaiian shirt.

Either one is welcome.

Neither outfit tells us what is happening in the heart.

God is not fooled by the costume, and God is not impressed by the costume.

He sees the person beneath it.

We may dress for the room, but we cannot dress the heart for God.

Galatians chapter 2 gives us an important example because it shows that even a genuine believer can behave hypocritically.

Peter had been eating with Gentile believers.

His conduct reflected a great Gospel truth.

Jewish believers and Gentile believers were one in Christ.

But when certain men arrived, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles because he feared what those men would think.

The truth had not changed.

The Gospel had not changed.

The Gentile believers had not changed.

The audience changed.

And when the audience changed, Peter changed his behavior.

Paul confronted him publicly because his actions were no longer consistent with the truth of the Gospel.

Other believers were carried away with that dissimulation.

Peter's conduct affected more than Peter.

It communicated to the Gentile believers that they were somehow less acceptable when a particular group entered the room.

Peter's failure does not prove that he never knew Christ.

It demonstrates that fear of people can tempt even a mature believer to put the mask back on.

That brings the question close to us.
Do my convictions change according to the room?
Do I speak differently about someone when that person leaves?
Do I hide my faith around people whose approval I want?
Do I suddenly become visibly spiritual only when church people are watching?
Am I kind to someone in public and cruel in private?
Am I generous where generosity will be noticed and indifferent where it will not?
When we need a different face for every audience, eventually we may forget which face is our own.
There is another danger.
Not every hypocrite consciously says, "I know I am pretending."
A person can perform a role so frequently that he begins to believe the performance.
Religious activity can become evidence, in his own mind, that his heart must be right.
He attends church.
He knows Scripture.
He gives money.
He prays publicly.
He holds a position.
He speaks the language of faith.
Those things may be good.
But none of them can substitute for an honest relationship with God.
The most dangerous mask is not the one that fools everybody else.
It is the mask that eventually fools the person wearing it.
James tells us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves.
He compares the hearer to a person looking at his natural face in a glass.
The person sees himself, walks away and forgets what he saw.
The answer is not to break the mirror because we dislike the reflection.
The answer is to remain before the Word and allow God to change us.
Do not use the Biblical mirror to inspect someone standing behind you.
Ask what the Word is showing you about your own face.
Now notice the remedy Jesus repeats in Matthew chapter 6.

He does not simply say, “Stop performing.”

He redirects our attention.

He says:

“Thy Father which seeth in secret.”

When you give, your Father sees.

When you pray, your Father sees.

When you fast, your Father sees.

The audience may not know.

Your family may not understand.

The church may never recognize it.

Your name may never appear anywhere.

But your Father sees.

He sees the gift no one applauds.

He sees the prayer no one hears.

He sees the sacrifice no one recognizes.

He sees the temptation quietly resisted.

He sees the lonely person you encouraged when no one was watching.

He sees the apology that cost you your pride.

He sees the act of obedience that brought you no earthly credit.

He sees the meal quietly purchased.

He sees the message sent to someone who needed hope.

He sees faithfulness when the room is empty.

And Jesus does not merely say that God sees.

He calls Him “thy Father.”

Not merely a distant deity.

Not merely an observer recording our conduct.

Your Father.

The One who created you.

The One who knows you completely.

The One whose love is not purchased by a performance.

The One who sees beneath the mask and still invites you to come near through Jesus Christ.

When we know the love of the Father and value His approval, we become less dependent upon the applause of the crowd.

That does not mean we stop caring about other people.

It does not mean we become rude or indifferent to how our conduct affects them.

It means their approval no longer determines who we are.

We can be faithful when they applaud.

We can be faithful when they misunderstand.

We can be faithful when no one notices.

I cannot preach this warning as though I am standing outside it.

Every pastor must ask whether he is preaching for the approval of God or for the approval of the room.

I must ask myself the same question I am asking you.

If no one applauded, would I still be faithful?

If no one complimented the sermon, would I still preach the truth with love?

If no one knew how many hours went into preparing a study, would the Father's knowledge be enough?

The desire for approval is not a temptation belonging only to someone else.

It can reach the pulpit.

It can reach the pew.

It can reach the person serving coffee.

It can reach the person giving quietly.

It can reach anyone who begins looking sideways to see who is watching.

We begin to remove the mask when the approval of our heavenly Father becomes more valuable than the applause of the audience.

So how do we remove it?

First, ask who the audience is.

Before you act, ask:

Whose approval am I seeking?

Am I doing this because it is right before God?

Or am I arranging the moment so someone will think more highly of me?

Motives can be mixed.

We may sincerely want to help and still enjoy being recognized.
The answer is not to become paralyzed and do nothing until every motive is perfect.
Bring the mixed motive before God.
Ask Him to purify it.
Choose obedience even when the applause is removed.
Second, notice what changes when the audience changes.
Does my treatment of people change?
Does my language change?
Do my convictions disappear?
Does my faith become a costume that I put on for church and remove everywhere else?
The changing audience may expose the changing performance.
Third, practice some obedience in secret.
Give without announcing it.
Pray when no one hears.
Serve where no one notices.
Meet a need without attaching your name.
Encourage someone without telling others what you did.
Secret obedience is not the only kind of obedience.
But it is good medicine for a heart addicted to recognition.
It teaches us again that the Father's knowledge is enough.
Fourth, confess the difference between appearance and reality.
Tell God the truth He already knows.
You do not need to explain the mask to Him.
You do not need to defend the image.
He already sees beneath it.
Confession does not inform God.
Confession brings us into agreement with God about what He already sees.
Fifth, stop defending the reputation at the expense of the soul.
Repentance is more valuable than reputation.
If you have wronged someone, make it right where you can.
If you have presented a false appearance, tell the truth with wisdom and humility.

If you have used religion to impress or control others, confess it.

The mask may feel as though it protects you.

In reality, it prevents anyone from knowing the real person, and it prevents the real person from receiving help.

Finally, remember the Gospel.

The answer to hypocrisy is not learning to perform sincerity more convincingly.

We can turn authenticity into another costume.

We can make a public performance out of being transparent.

We can even become proud of how humble we appear.

The Gospel offers something better than improved acting.

It gives us permission to leave the stage.

Christ did not die for the person we pretend to be.

He died for the sinner we truly are.

Romans tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

There is no need to approach the cross wearing a mask of righteousness.

The cross already declares that our own righteousness could never save us.

Jesus Christ died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again the third day.

Salvation is not an award given to the person who performs the best religious role.

It is the gift of God received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

The publican in Luke chapter 18 did not have an impressive speech.

He did not list his accomplishments.

He did not compare himself favorably with someone else.

He said:

“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Jesus said that man went down to his house justified.

The Pharisee had a performance.

The publican had a confession.

The Pharisee spoke about what he had done.

The publican asked for mercy.

One protected the image.

The other came honestly before God.

And the honest sinner received what the religious performer did not.

Grace.

If you have been hurt by hypocrisy, I want you to hear this clearly.

Jesus sees religious hypocrisy more clearly than you or I ever will.

The failure of someone who claimed the name of Christ does not mean Christ failed.

Do not confuse the mask worn by a religious person with the face of Jesus.

Look at Christ Himself.

He spoke truth.

He lived truth.

He showed compassion to sinners who came honestly.

He exposed those who used religion to conceal pride and corruption.

And He gave His life for people who could never save themselves by appearances.

If you are a believer, ask the Lord to show you where performance may have replaced worship.

Ask Him where reputation may have become more important than repentance.

Ask Him where fear of people has made you change faces according to the room.

Do not ask Him to help you repair the mask.

Ask Him to help you remove it.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you do not have to make yourself appear righteous before coming to Him.

Come honestly.

Admit that you are a sinner.

Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.

Place your trust in Him rather than in your own religious performance.

Call upon Him for salvation.

The real person beneath the mask is the person Jesus invites to come.

Let us pray.

Our heavenly Father, Your Word has searched us today.

You see what other people cannot see.

You know every motive.

You know every inconsistency.

You know every hidden wound and every hidden sin.

Forgive us for the times we have turned worship into performance.

Forgive us for the times we have wanted people to notice us more than we wanted them to glorify You.

Forgive us when we have protected our reputation instead of confessing the truth.

Help us remove the mask.

Give us courage to be honest with You.

Give us humility to make things right with others.

Help us remain faithful when no one notices.

Teach us to treasure the truth that our Father sees in secret.

Bring healing to anyone who has been wounded by religious hypocrisy.

Help that person look beyond the failures of people and see the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

And if someone is calling upon Christ for salvation today, let that person understand that salvation is by grace through faith.

Thank You that Jesus did not die for the person we pretend to be.

He died for us as we truly are.

Thank You for mercy.

Thank You for forgiveness.

Thank You that we do not have to perform for Your love.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Before we say our final aloha, let us take this question with us into the week.

Choose one act of obedience that no one else needs to know about.

Meet a need anonymously.

Pray privately for someone.

Encourage a person without seeking credit.

Give without announcing it.

Perform an unnoticed act of service.

Then, at the end of the week, ask yourself one question:

Was it enough that my heavenly Father saw it?

And if you share this study with someone, please do not send it with the message, “You need this.”

Begin by allowing God to search your own heart.

Then invite someone to reason together with you about the difference between struggling with sin and hiding behind a spiritual mask.

When the audience is gone, the lights are extinguished and the mask has been removed, your heavenly Father still sees you.

Because of Jesus Christ, you no longer have to perform.

You can come to Him as you truly are.

Thank you for being part of Reason Together Church today.

Please join us in the Reason Together Café for coffee and conversation.

And to those visiting with us for the first time, Aloha Nui Loa.

Aloha, and may the Lord help us live faithfully before the audience that matters most.

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

The Mask

RTS-032 | Matthew 6:1–18 KJV

A reader's companion to the sermon

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

About This Commentary

The Pastor's Commentary is a readable public companion to the sermon. It explains the principal Biblical reasoning, language questions and pastoral applications behind RTS-032. It is not a second sermon and it is not the internal Study Vault. Readers may use it for personal study, group discussion or careful follow-up after hearing the message.

This study asks, "What did Jesus mean when He called someone a hypocrite?" Most people answer that a hypocrite says one thing and does another. That is often true, but Matthew 6 reaches beneath inconsistency to expose religious performance. A good act can become a stage, other people can become the audience and praise can become the reward.

The title "The Mask" captures the contrast between a face presented to the audience and a reality concealed beneath it. That image must be used carefully. The Greek word translated "hypocrite" was associated with an actor or one playing a part. It does not literally mean "a man wearing a mask." The mask is a faithful illustration of the role, not a substitute for accurate word study.

The purpose of this Commentary is not to train readers to identify hypocrites across the room. It is to let the Word of God become a mirror. The central diagnostic question is personal: If no one except your heavenly Father knew, would you still do it?

Commentary in Brief

Matthew 6 describes three accepted religious practices: giving, prayer and fasting. Jesus does not condemn any of them. He says "when," not "if." His warning concerns the purpose for which they are performed. The hypocrites arrange their actions "that they may be seen of men." Human recognition becomes the intended reward.

This does not contradict Matthew 5:16, where Jesus says to let people see good works. In Matthew 5, observers glorify the Father. In Matthew 6, observers admire the performer. The difference is not merely whether an act is visible. It is what the act is trying to make visible and where the glory finally rests.

Hypocrisy is also not identical with ordinary Christian failure. A sincere believer may know what is right, fall short, confess the failure and seek grace to change. Hypocrisy protects the image. The honest struggler brings the failure into the light. The hypocrite manages the lighting.

Jesus repeats the remedy: "thy Father which seeth in secret." The Father's sight is both searching and comforting. He sees the performance hidden beneath religious activity, but He also sees quiet faithfulness that receives no applause. A believer who rests in the Father's knowledge and grace is free to stop living for the crowd.

The Gospel completes the answer. Christ did not die for the polished role we present. He died for the sinner we truly are. Grace therefore makes honesty possible. We can remove the mask, confess what is true and come to God without pretending that our reputation can save us.

1. Begin With Jesus's Exact Warning

Matthew 6:1 says, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." The decisive words are "to be seen." Jesus does not say that every act observed by another person is corrupted. He identifies a purpose. The deed is arranged so that human observation becomes its intended outcome.

The same outward action may have very different directions. A gift can quietly meet a neighbor's need. It can encourage others to generosity. It can express gratitude to God. It can also advertise the giver. The physical act alone does not tell the entire story. Jesus searches the purpose toward which the act is pointed.

This is why the passage should be preached as a warning before it is used as a label. "Take heed" calls the disciple to attention. The first task is not to decide who else is a hypocrite. The first task is to ask what audience and reward are shaping my own obedience.

2. The Pattern in Giving, Prayer and Fasting

Jesus repeats one structure three times. He names a legitimate practice, describes the public performance, states that the performers have received their reward and redirects the disciple toward the Father who sees in secret.

Practice	The performance	The correction
Giving	Announcing the deed so the giver receives glory	Give without self-advertisement before the Father who sees
Prayer	Choosing a manner or setting in order to be observed	Pray to the Father without needing a human audience
Fasting	Changing the appearance so deprivation becomes visible	Maintain a normal appearance and fast before the Father

The repeated pattern keeps us from blaming the practices. Giving did not create the hypocrisy. Prayer did not create it. Fasting did not create it. The performer redirected an act meant for God toward the approval of people.

This distinction matters because the answer to corrupted religion is not the abandonment of obedience. Jesus does not tell the disciple to stop giving, praying or fasting. He teaches the disciple to perform the act before the right audience and seek the right reward.

3. What Did "Hypocrite" Mean?

The Greek noun *hypokritēs* could refer to an actor or stage player and came to describe a pretender. An actor speaks words belonging to a role and presents a character before an audience. That background makes Jesus's use especially vivid. Religious activity can become a part played for observers.

Our English word hypocrisy often emphasizes duplicity, being two-faced or saying one thing while doing another. Jesus's examples include that possibility but reach deeper. A person may give real money, speak a real prayer or endure a real fast while still performing. The outward act is not necessarily counterfeit. Its direction has been corrupted.

The title "The Mask" therefore communicates a genuine feature of hypocrisy: a presented face can conceal another condition. Yet accuracy matters. We should say the word was associated with acting or playing a part. We should not say that its literal dictionary definition is "one who wears a mask." Ancient theater helps the illustration, but Matthew 6 supplies the meaning.

4. Is Every Inconsistent Christian a Hypocrite?

No. Inconsistency is a mismatch between belief and behavior. Hypocrisy may include that mismatch, but the words are not interchangeable. Every Christian who takes the Bible seriously will eventually discover areas where conduct has not yet matched conviction.

Peter believed the Gospel and still acted hypocritically in Galatians 2. Paul confronted him because his conduct toward Gentile believers changed when a particular group arrived. His fear of people caused him to behave contrary to the truth he confessed. Peter's act was real hypocrisy, but it did not prove that his entire life with Christ was a fraud.

The distinction can be stated simply. The honest struggler admits the contradiction, confesses it and seeks grace to change. The protected performer conceals the contradiction, minimizes it or redirects attention so the righteous image survives. Failure says, "I did not live what I believe." Hypocrisy says, "I must keep you believing that I did."

This distinction is not permission to remain careless. Grace does not make inconsistency harmless. It makes confession possible. The question is what we do when the Word reveals the mismatch.

5. The Difference Between Matthew 5 and Matthew 6

Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." One chapter later, Jesus warns against doing righteous acts before people "to be seen of them."

The commands are not contradictory. Matthew 5 describes visible faithfulness that directs attention beyond the disciple to the Father. Matthew 6 describes arranged visibility that makes the performer the object of admiration.

Question	Matthew 5:16	Matthew 6:1–18
May people see?	Yes, good works may be visible	The acts are deliberately arranged to be noticed
What do observers see?	A life that points beyond itself	A performer's apparent spirituality
Who receives glory?	The Father in heaven	The person performing the act
What is the reward?	God is honored	Human recognition is received

A useful question is not merely, "Did anyone see me?" Ask, "What was I trying to make them see?" Public testimony can glorify God. It can also advertise the speaker. Quiet service can be sincere. It can also be used privately to feed pride. Visibility alone does not diagnose the heart. Direction and purpose matter.

6. "They Have Their Reward"

After each example Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." The performers wanted recognition and received it. The applause is therefore both reward and judgment. It is the end for which the performance was designed.

Human approval is not always wrong. Encouragement can strengthen a weary servant. A congregation may appropriately thank people who serve. A parent may commend a child for kindness. Jesus is not forbidding gratitude or pretending that praise has no emotional effect.

The danger begins when recognition becomes the governing purpose. Applause is a fragile reward. It lasts only while the audience remains impressed. It must be renewed, protected and often increased. A person living for that reward may become trapped in an endless effort to preserve the role.

God's reward is different because His judgment is not based upon the edited presentation. He knows the hidden act, the unnoticed sacrifice and the motive that no human audience can measure perfectly.

7. Did People Literally Blow Trumpets Before Giving?

Jesus says, “do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do.” The image is unforgettable. A donor turns an act of mercy into an announcement.

Popular preaching sometimes claims that wealthy donors routinely hired literal trumpeters to gather a crowd before distributing alms. Reliable evidence for such a standard custom is insufficient. The sentence may be vivid hyperbole, a figurative announcement or an allusion whose exact social mechanics are no longer certain.

The Commentary does not need to solve that historical question in order to preserve Jesus's point. The safe wording is that Jesus paints the picture of announcing a gift so the giver receives attention. The unsafe wording is to describe an unverified routine as established history.

The principle remains current. A trumpet may now take the form of a carefully staged photograph, a repeated reminder, a public total or a story in which the giver becomes the hero. None of those forms automatically proves hypocrisy. They simply give us modern settings in which Jesus's question about purpose should be asked.

8. Prayer Can Become a Performance

Jesus says the hypocrites love to pray standing in synagogues and at street corners “that they may be seen of men.” Standing was not a sinful posture. Synagogues were not sinful locations. Jesus again locates the problem in the purpose of being observed.

A public prayer can genuinely lead a congregation before God. It can also become speech about God aimed primarily at the congregation. The vocabulary may grow impressive. The voice may change. The prayer may begin explaining matters to listeners rather than speaking honestly to the Father.

Jesus's instruction to enter a closet does not abolish public prayer. He prayed where disciples heard Him, and the early church prayed together. The private room functions as a test. When the crowd disappears, does the prayer remain? When no one admires the words, do we still want fellowship with the Father?

Private prayer also cannot be reduced to a technique for earning reward. Its value lies in relationship. “Thy Father” hears. The disciple is not speaking into an empty room. The absence of a human audience reveals the presence of the divine One.

9. Fasting Without Advertising

The hypocritical fasters changed their appearance so people would recognize their deprivation. Jesus tells the disciple to anoint the head and wash the face. In ordinary terms, maintain a normal appearance. Do not turn discomfort into spiritual advertising.

Fasting is not a competition in visible misery. It is a voluntary setting aside of a legitimate appetite in order to seek God with focused dependence. If the act is designed to produce admiration, the hunger may be real while the worship has been redirected.

Jesus does not require a person to create a false appearance of health or happiness. The instruction should not be used to shame someone whose medical condition, grief or weakness is visible. The point is not concealment at all costs. The point is refusing to manipulate appearance so others will award us a spiritual reputation.

10. The Outside and the Inside

Matthew 23 develops the outward and inward division with even stronger images. Jesus speaks of a cup clean outside while filth remains within. He compares the hypocritical leaders to whited sepulchres, beautiful outwardly but unclean inside.

The exterior matters in ordinary life. Christians should keep commitments, speak respectfully and avoid using supposed inward sincerity as an excuse for harmful conduct. Jesus is not teaching that outward obedience is worthless.

He is teaching that the exterior cannot substitute for the interior. A polished ministry, correct vocabulary, conservative appearance or admired reputation cannot cleanse hidden greed, pride, cruelty or unbelief. When appearance becomes more important than repentance, the outside becomes a shield protecting what God intends to transform.

The goal is not to destroy every reputation. It is to become the same person before God that we claim to be before people. Integrity joins the visible life and the hidden life under one Lord.

11. Why the Audience Changes the Role

Galatians 2 gives a concrete example. Peter ate with Gentile believers until certain people arrived. Then he withdrew because he feared them. Other Jewish believers followed, and Barnabas was carried away by their “dissimulation,” the KJV word in that verse for hypocrisy.

Peter’s doctrine had not changed between meals. The audience changed, and his behavior changed with it. Fear made him present one face to Gentile believers and another to the newly arrived group. His action communicated a denial of the Gospel’s fellowship even though his mouth could still state the Gospel correctly.

Not every adjustment to an audience is hypocrisy. Courtesy, translation, cultural sensitivity and role-appropriate communication can be faithful. Paul himself adapted his manner in order to reach people without changing the truth. Hypocrisy occurs when the audience causes us to conceal conviction, deny another person, protect status or behave contrary to the truth we claim.

A strong diagnostic is: Which convictions disappear when a particular person enters the room?

12. Hypocrisy Can Include Self-Deception

A performer ordinarily knows that a stage role is not his everyday identity. Religious hypocrisy can be more complicated. Repeated performance may become so familiar that the person no longer recognizes the separation between appearance and reality.

Jesus’s words in Matthew 23 combine pretense with blindness. The leaders are responsible for outward display and inward corruption, yet they also fail to see themselves accurately. Hypocrisy does not always require a person privately announcing, “I know I am a fraud.”

This is one reason Scripture must function as a mirror. James describes the hearer who looks into a mirror and then forgets what he saw. The purpose of the mirror is not humiliation. It is accurate sight leading to obedient change.

Trusted Christian community also matters. Peter needed Paul’s confrontation. A person surrounded only by admirers may receive applause but little help. Faithful friends do not merely affirm the role. They love the person enough to speak truth.

13. The Father Who Sees in Secret

Jesus repeats, “thy Father which seeth in secret.” The remedy for performance is not a life lived without any audience. It is a life lived before the right audience.

The Father’s sight warns us because hidden motives are not hidden from Him. A public act cannot impress Him into overlooking private cruelty. A religious title cannot persuade Him that appearance is reality.

His sight also comforts us. The Father sees the gift no one mentions, the prayer no one hears, the temptation quietly resisted and the service for which no one says thank you. Human neglect does not make faithfulness invisible.

The supplied sermonette rightly emphasized how knowing the Father can loosen the grip of human applause. That insight should not be turned into the claim that every form of hypocrisy has only one cause. Scripture also names pride, love of praise, fear of people, hidden corruption and self-deception. Yet Jesus’s repeated remedy remains powerful: learn that the Father’s knowledge is more decisive than the crowd’s opinion.

14. What About Mixed Motives?

Many sincere believers discover mixed motives. A person may serve from love for God and also enjoy being appreciated. A preacher may desire to help people and also feel the pull of recognition. A giver may care about a need and still notice the desire to be admired.

The answer is not paralysis. If Christians waited for perfectly unmixed motives before obeying, very little obedience would occur. Bring the motive to God, ask Him to purify it and continue doing what is right.

The presence of temptation is not identical with surrender to performance. Matthew 6 calls us to vigilance. “Take heed” means pay attention to the direction of the heart. It does not mean perform an endless inward inspection until every good act feels suspicious.

One practical test is to remove unnecessary opportunities for recognition. Another is to continue serving when recognition disappears. A third is to thank God when someone else receives credit for a good result.

15. When Church Hypocrisy Has Hurt You

Religious hypocrisy causes deep wounds because it uses sacred words to protect an unsacred reality. Some people have experienced manipulation, concealed abuse, financial dishonesty, cruel leadership or public holiness joined to private harm.

Jesus does not ask wounded people to pretend those things are unimportant. No one spoke more directly against religious hypocrisy than Christ. His denunciation in Matthew 23 shows that exposing false spiritual appearance is not an attack upon Christianity. It is part of Christ’s own work.

At the same time, the failure of a representative does not make Christ false. A counterfeit bill depends upon the existence of genuine currency. A hypocritical use of Christian language reveals the person’s contradiction of Christ, not Christ’s agreement with the contradiction.

Honesty does not require indiscriminate public disclosure. Confession should be truthful, appropriate and wise. Where hidden conduct includes abuse, coercion, crime or danger, church reputation and pastoral privacy must never replace proper safeguarding, reporting or professional help.

16. Removing the Mask Is More Than Admitting It

A person can confess hypocrisy in a manner that becomes another performance. A dramatic admission may gather sympathy, protect control or create a new reputation for transparency. Repentance is more than announcing that a mask exists.

Biblical repentance names what is true, turns from the protected contradiction and takes the next obedient step. That may include private confession to God, an apology to someone harmed, restitution, accountability, withdrawal from a role for a season or acceptance of consequences.

The goal is not public humiliation. The goal is truth before God and repair where harm has occurred. Different situations require different forms of response, but none is helped by preserving an appearance at the expense of reality.

Grace makes this possible. If salvation depended upon maintaining a spiritual résumé, confession would be terrifying. Because salvation rests in Christ, the believer can tell the truth. The Gospel does not merely remove the mask. It gives the person beneath it a place to stand.

The Final Answer

What did Jesus mean when He called someone a hypocrite? He meant more than a person who occasionally failed to practice what he preached. He exposed righteous appearance performed or protected for an audience while hidden purpose or reality told another story.

In Matthew 6, the giving, prayer and fasting were real acts. They became hypocritical because human observation and praise became their intended reward. The performer used religion as a stage and the crowd's approval as payment.

Imperfection alone is not hypocrisy. A genuine believer can act hypocritically and require correction, as Peter did in Galatians 2. The distinction appears in the response to failure. The honest struggler confesses and seeks grace to change. The hypocrite protects the image.

Jesus redirects the disciple toward "thy Father which seeth in secret." The Father sees through performance, but He also sees every unnoticed act of faithfulness. His knowledge frees us from the exhausting labor of living for applause.

The Gospel supplies the final hope. Christ died for the real sinner, not the edited role. We do not remove the mask so God can begin knowing us. We remove it because He already knows us and in Christ invites us to come honestly.

Questions for Personal or Group Reflection

- What repeated pattern connects giving, prayer and fasting in Matthew 6?
- Why are the words "to be seen" more important than the public setting alone?
- How do Matthew 5:16 and Matthew 6:1 differ in the destination of glory?
- What is the difference between inconsistency and protected pretense?
- How does Peter's conduct in Galatians 2 show the influence of a changing audience?
- Which convictions become harder to express when a particular person or group is present?
- What quiet act would you continue if no one except your heavenly Father ever knew?
- How can appreciation be received gratefully without becoming the reason for service?
- Where might public reputation be delaying an honest conversation or needed repentance?
- How should the church respond when hypocrisy includes abuse, danger or criminal conduct?
- Why can confession itself become another performance?

How does the Gospel make honesty safer than image management?

Interpretive Cautions

- Do not say the Greek word for hypocrite literally means “mask wearer.” Actor or pretender is defensible; the mask is the governing illustration.
- Do not claim that donors routinely hired literal trumpeters as an established historical custom.
- Do not treat every public prayer, testimony, gift or ministry update as hypocritical.
- Do not treat secrecy as automatic proof of sincerity.
- Do not equate every failure or inconsistency with hypocrisy.
- Do not diagnose a person's heart from clothing, tattoos, piercings, photographs or social-media use.
- Do not claim that a Christian who acts hypocritically must therefore possess no genuine faith.
- Do not make a perfectly unmixed motive a prerequisite for obedience.
- Do not use a sermon on hypocrisy primarily to settle a conflict with someone else.
- Do not let pastoral confidentiality protect abuse, coercion, crime or danger from proper action.
- Do not make public confession the required response to every private failure.
- Do not stop at exposure. Better behavior without Gospel grace can become a more convincing costume.

A Personal Invitation to Christ

The message of Matthew 6 is not that God will accept us once we perform religion convincingly. The message exposes the impossibility of saving ourselves through appearance.

The Bible says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23 KJV) That includes the sins others see and the sins hidden beneath a respectable role.

Jesus Christ lived without sin, died upon the cross for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 KJV)

Christ did not die for the mask. He died for the person beneath it. You do not need to persuade Him that you are better than you are. Come honestly, admit your sin, believe that He died and rose again and trust Him as your personal Savior.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9 KJV)

If you have trusted Christ, tell a mature believer and begin following Him in the fellowship of a faithful church. The Christian life is not the successful maintenance of a part. It is an honest walk with the Savior who already knows you.

Pastoral Note

A message on hypocrisy can easily become a weapon. Most listeners can identify someone else before the first page is finished. The safer pastoral posture is to let the Word act as a mirror. Leaders and teachers should enter that examination first because public ministry creates unusual pressure to protect an image.

People wounded by church hypocrisy should be heard without being pressured to excuse what happened. Christ's condemnation of hypocrisy gives the church no permission to defend false appearances for the sake of institutional reputation.

At the same time, believers prone to excessive self-examination may fear that every imperfect motive makes them fraudulent. Matthew 6 calls for honesty, not despair. Obey what is right, bring mixed motives to God and ask Him to purify them.

A suit and tie does not reveal the heart. Shorts and a Hawaiian shirt do not reveal the heart. Reason Together Church welcomes both. The issue is not whether a person fits a preferred outward style. It is whether we are becoming truthful before the Father who sees in secret.

Any donations or love gifts are appreciated, but they are never required to attend Reason Together Church or to download our free online studies. Giving is worship, not the price of admission and not a stage upon which anyone must perform.

Selected Scripture and Study Resources

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Matthew 5:14–16. Visible good works that lead observers to glorify the Father.

Matthew 6:1–18. The controlling passage on giving, prayer, fasting, human praise and the Father who sees in secret.

Matthew 7:1–5. The beam and the mote, with self-examination preceding correction of another.

Matthew 15:7–9 and Mark 7:6. Lips that honor God while the heart remains far from Him.

Matthew 23:1–13, 23–28. Works done to be seen, outward cleanliness and inward corruption.

Luke 12:1–3. Hypocrisy as leaven and the eventual disclosure of what is hidden.

Luke 18:9–14. The Pharisee's self-presenting prayer and the publican's plea for mercy.

Galatians 2:11–14. Peter, Barnabas, fear of people and the conduct called “dissimulation” in the KJV.

James 1:22–25. The Word of God as a mirror that calls the hearer to obedient response.

Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Entries for *hypokritēs*, *hypokrisis*, *theaomai* and *apechō*.

Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Entries for *hypokritēs* and related forms.

R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew*; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*.

A Closing Prayer

Our heavenly Father, thank You that You see in secret. Search us and show us where worship has become performance, where reputation has become more important than repentance and where fear of people has changed our conduct. Keep us from using this study to accuse someone else while refusing the mirror of Your Word. Thank You for every quiet act of faithfulness that people overlook but You remember. Give courage to those wounded by religious hypocrisy and bring hidden harm into the light with truth, justice and proper care. Purify our mixed motives without allowing us to retreat from obedience. Thank You that Jesus Christ died for the person beneath the mask. Teach us to confess honestly, receive grace and live as the same person before You and before others. In Jesus's name, amen.

Carry This Study Into the Week

Reopen Matthew 6 during the coming week. Read verses 1–18 and mark every reference to being seen, receiving a reward and the Father who sees in secret. Notice that Jesus does not abolish giving, prayer or fasting. He redirects each practice.

Choose one good act that can remain unannounced. Meet a need, encourage someone, pray for a person or serve in a way that does not require recognition. Let the Father's knowledge be enough.

Then use the controlling question on one ordinary part of life: If no one except my heavenly Father knew, would I still do it? Do not use the question to create shame. Use it to identify the audience that is shaping the act.

If the study reveals a protected contradiction, take one honest step. Confess to God. Speak with a mature believer. Apologize where appropriate. Seek proper safeguarding or professional help where harm or danger is involved. Do not attempt to repair the entire public image. Begin by telling the truth.

Finally, look for someone serving without applause. Offer sincere encouragement without turning the person's service into a spectacle. Gratitude can honor faithfulness while still directing glory to the Father.

Until We Reason Together Again

The mask may impress an audience, but it cannot create integrity. Jesus calls us down from the stage and into life before the Father who sees what no crowd can see.

The Father's sight is not merely the threat that hidden things are known. It is the assurance that unnoticed faithfulness is known too. We do not have to announce every gift, display every prayer or advertise every sacrifice.

And when the mirror reveals a contradiction, we do not need to polish the role. We can come to Christ. He already knows the person beneath the mask, and He offers grace to make honesty possible.

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Reason Together Church
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