

Confessions of a Hypocrite

By Jamie Buckingham

Recently I've been praying, asking God about my gifts and calling. Then one morning it came to me, very clearly, that I had the unique gift of being a hypocrite.

That disturbed me, for I've always looked on hypocrites as preachers who said one thing but did another, or common folks on whom the roofs of churches fell if they walked into them on any day except Easter.

Actors. That's what the word means, you know. People behind masks. Preachers who wear hairpieces, evangelists who own Busch Beer stock, deacons who keep company with prostitutes.

Actually, though, hypocrites occupy a very important place in the kingdom—like germs and mold. Why, just look at how many there are. In fact, I seldom go through a day without talking to at least one.

"Your church is full of hypocrites," people complain.

"Then join us. You'll feel right at home," I say.

Actually, we're not as rare as you might imagine. In fact, there are so many of us that most larger churches now have a hypocrites' pastor, just as they have a singles' pastor or youth director.

Since this discovery I've felt a lot better about myself. As it takes one alcoholic to minister to another, my hypocrisy makes me credible when I minister to other hypocrites.

"You are what you hate—you hate what you are," my friend Swen Oleson says. Only he says it with a Swedish accent that makes it sound really profound. The way to discern your gift is to look at your fruit. So, I've been doing some fruit inspecting. Sure enough, just as some are apostles, prophets or evangelists—I'm gifted as a hypocrite.

Take this column. Only a genuine hypocrite like me would write a column to Christians saying "Shut up and stay home. If you go on public TV, talk about God's love." Then, before the ink is dry, accept an invitation from Geraldo Rivera to appear on his New York talk show.



Jamie Buckingham
is an award-winning
columnist and popular
conference speaker.

"It's Holy Week and we want you to talk about God's love toward all people," he lied before the show, "especially those who fail."

I should have known, right then, where the program was headed. But hypocrites are naive. I didn't know until cameras were rolling, and they opened with the Swaggart tapes, that I had been set up as a tumblebug (see Last Word, April 1988).

Like most Christians, I have enough religion so I don't enjoy sinning, but not enough to keep me from it. So, in true hypocritical form, I told the producer I would not answer questions about Swaggart. But instead of walking off the show—as I should have done—I just slouched miserably in my chair while Geraldo played buzzard and went after Swaggart's carcass. Jimmy Swaggart has made some huge mistakes. The biggest, though, was not his bizarre sexual behavior. Despite the fact the Assemblies of God program for rehabilitating fallen preachers is an unworkable sham, Jimmy could have won the hearts of the world by saying, "I'll take a year off and travel the nation. I'll visit little churches—playing the piano, ushering, and serving as a janitor." I'm convinced God would have doubled his finances. But when a man says he is indispensable to "the ministry," God often replies: "If it's yours, then you can run it by yourself."

Swaggart may be without faith, unable to believe God can provide money

without him, but he is not king of the hypocrites. No, the real hypocrites are those of us who sit back and go "tch, tch" while fantasizing of doing the same things ourselves. The primary reason we don't is we fear our playmate may start calling the office, demanding millions in hush money—and we don't have a former district superintendent on our staff to cover for us (i.e. PTL). Or we're afraid the preacher we've had defrocked for messing around with women might catch us with a woman of the night. Even worse, what if it turns out the prostitute is Catholic—and we've been preaching for years that it's a sin to fellowship with those folks. Gulp!

But when I realize one of the reasons I don't do "those things" is I might get caught, too...well, who's the hypocrite?

Hypocrites are those who don't get caught. Everyone else is just a plain old sinner.

Hypocrites are always afraid one of their old holiness sermons might grow legs and crawl back home. What could be worse than preaching that your sins will find you out, then having one of them find you out?

Hypocrites love to attack other hypocrites. They write nasty letters to editors and sit in television audiences, booing and hissing. One in Geraldo's audience sneered on camera. "We needed more Mother Teresas and fewer Tammy Bakkers."

I'd had enough. Despite my resolve to keep my mouth shut I responded, asking how much money he'd given to Mother Teresa. He got so angry Geraldo edited out both my question and his vulgar answer.

The really good stuff never makes it on TV—or into print.

When I realized I was gifted as a hypocrite I was upset. Then I found a verse in the Bible which confirmed it. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29).

That's me! We hypocrites are "without repentance." But what's there to repent of when you're always right and everyone else is always wrong? ■