
FORMALIST AND HYPOCRISY

THE PARTNERING of Formalist and Hypocrisy by Bunyan is no mere coincidence because the one character is merely a matured extension and a logical continuation of the other. A hypocrite is simply a formalist all grown up, developed and refined in thought and act.

Further, the religious community is a comfortable place for both to grow and thrive. The picture of these two as they jump over the wall to get into the way illustrates that a shortcut to salvation is desired, sought and used to advantage by both formalists and hypocrites alike.

We ought to fix two principles firmly in our minds as we proceed. The first is this: all of mankind is born hopelessly religious. The second calls us to consider that though the first be true, in this religious bent there is not an inherent affinity for the God of the Bible and the salvation He offers to religious creatures. In fact quite the opposite is true. The Apostle Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, makes it clear that "there is none righteous ... there is none that seeks after God" (Romans 3:10–11). Nonetheless, men are religious and men do seek after something to satisfy the spiritual void within.

It is most interesting that many of us began our religious existence as "little formalists," completely unaware that formalism had quickly taken root within us. Our regular attendance to church service, the singing of hymns, the reciting of prayers, the memorizing of catechisms and even the reading of Scripture itself all contributed to a "form of godliness" (2 Timothy 3:5). All of these things were rightly taught by well-meaning parents and teachers, but to many of us it was simply *form without spirit*. There was no animating principle in the heart, no regard to any kind of inner significance.

Of course, it is biblical to teach and instruct children from the cradle up, even as Timothy was taught the Scriptures from his youth by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 3:15). But Timothy was a formalist like all others until there was a mighty act of God upon his soul whereby he was saved and called with a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9).

Hypocrisy, on the other hand, is a natural outgrowth of unconverted formalism where there is no activity of the Spirit of God giving a new heart and a new spirit within and taking away the heart of stone (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Bunyan's characters came from the land of Vain-glory and had their sights upon Zion; however, they did not come into the way by the gate, and they shed no burden at the Cross. Religious pride must be the worst kind of pride. True humility in religious activities is such a difficult thing—just at the time we think we have it is the precise time we lose it. On the other hand, how often do we live like the hypocrite, sucking up the adulation of men, loving ourselves, allowing self-righteousness to secretly swell our hearts as we compare ourselves with other men until vain-glory consumes us and we become complete in our self-deception.

It is noteworthy that Jesus did not castigate the Pharisees for temple ritual and ceremony. Forms and rites are not bad in themselves as long as there is foremost a coupling of heart and an inner significance to the reality behind the form. The leaders of Israel had departed from Jehovah because they had the truth of God in their minds without the love of God in their hearts.

Thomas Shepard, the great New England Puritan, once said words that ought to strike fear in all of us: "Evangelical truth without evangelical love makes an evangelical hypocrite."
