

The Danger of Hypocrisy

By

Elder Enoch Ofori Jnr

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He Knows what is in Man

Shakespeare, the celebrated British playwright, in a profound observation of human nature, once said, "there is no art to find the mind's construction on the face". To a large extent this is a truism. Man is a most devious creature, a bundle of contradictions akin to the Biblical portrayal of man as a synthesis of good and evil at best. He can choose to be either patently evil or patently good. At the same time, he can put on an exterior of piety with evil lurking within. Only the colour-changing chameleon perhaps comes close to this ingenious display of dissimulation!

In the event, it is only the individual who knows what his true thoughts are. There is absolutely no "art" to decipher his true self buried deep in the recesses of his mind. But this is only true at the human level. The Creator God "in whom we live, move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) has the "art" and ability to decode our true natures and lay them bare. It's laughable to pretend to holiness in His sight. It is absolutely useless however 'refined' the pretence. Our very breath gives us away: "The spirit [or breath] of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all his innermost parts" (Prov. 20:27 *ESV*).

Not only is the search thorough, it is also foolproof. No camouflage employed can sway God. Change the environment to a church setting, sing halleluiahs to His name, confess your supposed 'born-again' status. None of these will impress God who searches hearts (Rom. 8:27) except you have had a complete change of heart resulting in a surrender to His will. The fallout is that God will not commit Himself to you nor accept you as one of His own. All because your heart testifies against you (1 John 3:19-20).

Such was the cool attitude Jesus adopted towards a large group of people who, in a festive mood, came cheering Him and professing faith in Him. Their cheers and confessions hardly moved Him because He was unimpressed by their hidden inward nature:

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did.

"But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men,

"And needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man" (John 2:23-25).

The setting was a religious event-- Passover feast--an occasion where one would expect genuine profession of faith, but Christ would not be deceived. The Master did not place confidence in all those cheering overnight disciples of His moved to faith in Him by the miracles they saw Him perform because, as He knew of all men, He knew what was in them.

Your mere presence in the church is not an affirmation of a sincere, saving faith. You may simply be following the crowd. Or you may be in church because of your wife or husband or a friend. A miracle might have even been the hook, as in the case of the unnamed 'converts' in the account. But short of true conversion, being an inward transformation reflected in righteous behaviour, you are engaged in mere spiritual theatrics. You have not won Christ over. This tells us that while miracles

may arouse interest in the Lord and His church, they do not necessarily lead to genuine faith unless there is true heartfelt repentance and conversion. And that means salvation has not been attained. The Apostle Peter urged the astonished worshippers who thronged him and the apostle John and the lame man they had just healed at the Beautiful gate of the temple, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

All the initial things that attract a person to Christ must lead to this end: Repentance and conversion in return for spiritual refreshing (Holy Spirit baptism) from the Lord Jesus Christ! Otherwise, Christ will not commit Himself to you. Because He knows what is in *unregenerate* man!

Jesus' knowledge of the inner disposition and spirit of man speaks of an inherent ability that is exclusively and inimitably divine: God is the searcher of hearts (Ps 44:21, Jer. 17:10) and even of its thoughts that are far off (Ps. 139:2).

David impressed on his son Solomon:

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever" (1 Chron. 28:9).

So get it straight, you cannot hide your true colours from Christ. He knows the treachery and evil of the human heart. Your very breath is His lamp whereby He searches out the secrets of your heart. Nothing is hidden in His sight; "all things are naked and opened to Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

So, what is inside your heart as a human being that Christ so intimately knows?

It's a sordid list:

Mark 7:21-23

"... from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man".

That makes the heart a hub of wickedness as the prophet Jeremiah put it succinctly in Jer. 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

This is the heart God seeks to convert and win over. And His Word and Spirit make a good job of it:

John 16:8

"And when He [the Spirit] is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment".

Acts 2:37-38

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost".

Heb 4:12

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart".

John 15:3

"Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you".

Ps 119:9, 11

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word.

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee".

So then, a heart that is "desperately wicked" must only be true of the unconverted. But is that really the case? Is the Church, "the ground and pillar of truth", completely rid of fickle and dishonest hearts?

Heaven is outraged by Hypocrites in the Congregation

The phenomenon of hypocrites in the house of God is not supposed to be, but it exists because conversion takes both divine action and human response to be effected. While it's God who grants repentance to people (Acts 5:31, 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25-26), the cooperation of the persons so favoured is required. God never imposes His will on people. He empowers us to conform to His character if only we are willing:

Isa 1:19-20

"If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:

"But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it".

Rev. 22:17

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely".

Thus the hypocrites in the church are *unwilling*. They have consciously and deliberately hardened themselves to the exhortations of the Word as well as the promptings of the Spirit. They have refused to be led by the Spirit. They see no point in working out their own salvation with "fear and trembling" (see Phil. 2:12). They like the fanfare; they want to hang out with the religious and indeed seek recognition as such. But to carry out the core responsibility that goes with being a saint of God is of least concern to them, namely: "... lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jam. 1:21; see also Eph. 5:3-5).

The attitude of the churchgoing hypocrites riles God no end:

"But to the wicked God says: 'What right have you to recite My statutes or take My covenant on your lips?

"'For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you'.

"'If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers'.

"'You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit'.

"'You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son'.

"These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

"Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

"The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies Me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!" (Ps 50:16-23).

God's condemnation of the double life of hypocrites is total and unremitting. They mouth His law and even rattle off portions of scripture to impress others. But they reject the discipline of His Word. Hence they hobnob with evil-doers, spew pure falsehoods and tear into the innocent with their sharp teeth. For a time God has remained silent, but His rebuke is on the way, and it will hit them so hard they will not escape. It's only to those who 'order their way rightly' that God will show His salvation.

The hypocrite has missed out on God's commitment to his salvation, because he never really wanted it in the first place.

Is such a (spiritual) life worth it? You are playing games with God and thereby toying with your eternal destiny. You seek fellowship with both light and darkness, Christ and Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-15). Once you put in your weekly appearance at church, you go back to your worldly ways and habits-- and sometimes it shows up at church in your relations with other worshippers. Your tongue is acerbic, ready to return every put-down as well as rebuff any correction from church officials. You belong to a clique of gossips in the church and in fact you are the chief gossip. I could drag out the vice list...

If the above description is your life in and out of the church, you should not delude yourself that you are better off than the 'un-churched'. Your hope shall perish: "...and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: ... for an hypocrite shall not come before Him" (Job 8:13, 13:16).

"Therefore the Lord shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 9:17).

The hypocrite's worship is vain worship (Matt. 15:7-9). He never commits himself to God and neither does God commit Himself to him. It's a game of two 'wily' fellows: "With the pure Thou wilt shew Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt shew Thyself froward" (Ps 18:26).

Instead of salvation, destruction stares the hypocrite in the face. Such is not your calling. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9).

So diligently seek the LORD with all your heart and soul, and you will find Him (Deut. 4:29). The Lord Jesus seeks your total allegiance or none. He knocks at the door of your heart for full residence in your life (Rev. 3:20). He won't settle for half-hearted devotion; neither should you! He's worthy of your total allegiance. Amen!

