

Who Was That Masked Man?

Dee Bowman

When I was a kid we played outside a lot. We played games, games like Cowboys and Indians and Cowboys and Outlaws. The Cowboys always won. We'd strap on our guns and don our big hats and suddenly we were Cowboys. If we were the Indians, we'd put on a headband of some sort and stick a turkey feather in it and viola! we were Chief Red Fox or somebody. We called the game "p'like," a shortened form of play-like. It was fun. You could be whoever you wanted to be. If you wanted to be a Cowboy, you had to scream at the cattle and sing a dogie song, and you had to beat up the Outlaws with your bare fists. If you wanted to be an Indian, you rode a stick horse that had no saddle and learned to scream blood-curdling screams. It was all a matter of dressing the part, saying the right things, and playing the role.

Few things are more repugnant than hypocrisy. And yet it reaches into everyone's life at some time or the other. We almost always assign hypocrisy to the other fellow, but if we're honest, we'll all admit to having played the hypocrite at some time in our lives.

A hypocrite is one who merely plays a part. He's an actor. In fact, the word came to us from a Greek term that originally described a thespian, a person who played different roles by wearing a mask. One person might play several roles; and he did so by merely changing his mask. Sounds somewhat like our idiom two-faced, doesn't it?

Jesus dealt with hypocrites in a firm way. In fact, it seems from a perusal of the Scriptures that He was more turned off by hypocrisy than by almost any other sin. The Pharisees practiced the art of hypocrisy with great skill. They had learned their lines well.

The Pharisees did their charitable deeds "to be seen of men"(Read Matthew 6). They were wont to herald the action by having a trumpet sound when they came to do their charity. What a sad sight! True philanthropy is mostly done in secret and is for the benefit of the recipient rather than the giver. The kind of charity Jesus recommends is the kind that is so obscure that even the left hand doesn't not know what the right hand is doing. There is no place in the church for feigned liberality.

And when they prayed, they emoted lines—memorized parts, if you please. They made grand speeches in their prayers and gave great utterances calculated to show (note the

word) their “piety” and “righteousness.” They spoke in grand, swelling terms and took great care to make rounded tones, enunciate words, and inflect the language carefully. Only one problem: it was not real. In reality, they had little piety and even less righteousness. It was all a show.

When the Pharisees observed a fast, they disfigured their faces and made contortions to show (note the word) to men that what they were doing took great discipline. Actually, they just put on make-up. The whole act was a show. It was not real worship in which they dedicated themselves truly to God. They wanted others to see them do what they did, that’s all.

What about our worship? Do we do what we do so as “to be seen of men”? When we pray is our prayer intended to help all of us reach out to God, or is it for the approval of those who hear the prayer? Do we sing so that someone might be impressed with our ability to sing in tune or blend perfectly; or do we sing our songs so that God is glorified and men are taught and edified? And when we make a comment, is it calculated to contribute something to someone’s understanding or to prove to someone how “spiritual” and highly educated we are? We best be careful, folks.

How can we guard against hypocrisy? Let each man examine his heart. Motive is a vital part of worship. “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God,” said Solomon, “and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil” (Ecclesiastes 5:1-ff). We can just give lip service—and that’s a “sacrifice of fools.” If we don’t come to the house of God with the desire of heart to laud and glorify our Father, we end up just going through the motions—and that’s a sacrifice of fools. We can repeat what we do so often and for so long that we even forget the reasons for doing it (“for they do not know that they do evil”)—and that’s the sacrifice of fools as well.

Let each man look up. Up toward God, not out toward man. We look to please God. And if I please God and you please God, we will be pleasing to one another. But it starts with a desire to be right with Him, to accord to Him the praise and honor He rightfully deserves. He is the object of our worship and we need to remember not to look down, not to look around, not to look over to one side or the other, but to look up toward God. He is our object.

Let each man remember Who He Is. We are mortal. We have all sinned. We must be more cognizant of our dependence on God. No matter how much I impress you with my look of sanctity, I have, by doing so, done nothing to secure my salvation or to broaden my hope. We must remember that God is on His throne and in order to please Him we must point our worship to Him where He is. We have no time to waste impressing one

another; we must make sure He is impressed with us, with our devotion, our filial feelings of love, as well as our total dedication. Any less will not do. We owe Him the best we have to offer because of Who He Is.

There is no place in the kingdom for masks. There is no place for make-up or costumes. There is no place for memorized lines and staged entrances and exits. There is only room for honest hearts. That's all.