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AM I SELF-DECEIVED ?

COULD a more startling question be asked ? I must soon appear at the judgment-bar. Omniscient purity will speedily search me through. Every disguise will then be torn off. The truth will come out. Eternity will be to me full of bliss or woe, according to the character I shall then have. I am a professor of religion. Perhaps, in the judgment of my charitable friends, I am pious. But is their judgment correct ? Am I a hypocrite ? O, that I knew ! My heart does not accuse me of that gross kind of hypocrisy which, "for a pretence, makes long prayers," at the very time I am thinking how I may rob widows and orphans. Yet my "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." I know that much of the hypocrisy in the world is of a very subtle and insidious nature. It may be so with me. Am I a hypocrite ? I will honestly inquire.

It is no proof that I am not one, that my *neighbors do not say that I am*. There never were greater hypocrites on earth than the Pharisees. Yet the people commonly thought them very pious, and said, "If but two men are saved, one of them will be a Pharisee." Nor does the good opinion of *pious* and *eminent* men prove me to be a genuine Christian. The apostles all seem to have had a high opinion of Judas. Simon Magus won Peter's confidence. Paul at one time thought well of Demas. I may be a hypocrite while others think me a saint.

It is not certain that I am not a hypocrite, because I have not been in the habit of *regarding myself as one*. I am much inclined to think well of myself. It would require

more than common candor to indict one's self for so high a crime. Many of the vilest hypocrites have abounded in self-confidence and self-esteem. Job was *grieved* at the charge of hypocrisy ; but he did not show half the temper that the Pharisees did when the same charge was brought against them. Perhaps no persons have a better opinion of themselves than the grossest hypocrites.

Nor is it certain that I am not a hypocrite, because my history *corresponds in some things with the experience of some eminent professors*. First of all, some eminent professors are hypocrites, and it requires no grace for me to attain to the same experience with them. Again, it may be that it is merely in unessential incidents and circumstances, and not in the very essence of piety, that my experience agrees with that of others.

ONE MARK OF A HYPOCRITE is, that while he may be wise, and prudent, and knowing in worldly matters, he is *not so in the things of religion*. The Spirit of Christ does not rest upon him. He has not the anointing which teacheth him "all things." He is not "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord." The hypocrite may be of high intellectual attainments—may discourse fluently, and even eloquently, on religious truths ; yet he has no spiritual discernment. He is blind, and cannot see afar off. Jesus Christ says that this spiritual blindness and ignorance rested on the hypocrites of his day. Matt. 16 : 2, 3. No hypocrite has "evidence of things not seen" by the senses, or by carnal reason. O, that I may not fail of heaven at last !

If I do not love *secret prayer*, I must be a hypocrite. An unregenerate man may pray, when terrified, or sick, or afflicted, or when his conscience is somewhat quickened, but he has no love for prayer even then. Returning prosperity drives him from his closet. Will God hear the hypocrite's "cry, when trouble cometh upon him ? Will he

delight himself in the Almighty ? Will he always call upon God ?” Job 27 : 9, 10. This is an awful subject. Seek to understand it well. Be honest. O, my soul, dost thou delight in God ? Hast thou pleasure in the Almighty ? Dost thou love to commune with him ? Dost thou love prayer ?

Hypocrites are subject to strong fears and *terrors in times of Divine judgments*. When war, famine, or pestilence threatens a land, or when personal calamities gather thickly around the spurious professor, he is often filled with dismay. Seriously threaten to take from him property, liberty, character, or life, and he knows not what to do. The prospect of speedy death is dismal to him. Isaiah, having described some terrible judgments, says, “The sinners in Zion are afraid : fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites.” Chap. 33 : 14. The termination of their lives is sometimes heart-rending. The rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon the ill-founded house, and it falls, and great is the fall of it. O, my soul, shall thy hopes be all blasted at last ?

He that indulges in severe and harsh *censure of others* for minor faults, and condemns not himself for greater faults, is a hypocrite. Matt. 7 : 1, 5. How is my practice in this respect ? With what judgment I judge, I shall be judged. Then, what will be my eternal destiny ? O, my soul, practise no deceit on thyself here. Am I a hypocrite ?

To be prompt in promising, and *tardy in performing*, is a part of a hypocritical character. A good man, intending to do all he engages to do, is slow in passing his word. But hypocrites “say, and do not.” Matt. 23 : 3. They say, We go, Lord ; but they go not. They abound in promises and professions of obedience and love ; but they stop at that. Is this my character ? How am I keeping my solemn vows, made at the table of the Lord ?

Ostentation is another feature of a hypocritical character. Matt. 23 : 5. So is a hiding of sin under specious pretences. Matt. 23 : 14. Punctilious scrupulosity about little matters, and neglect of the substantial duties of life, is another mark of a hypocrite. Those who lived in Christ's day, strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. They gave a tenth of all their garden herbs, and yet they were cruel, unjust, and faithless. How stands my character in these respects ?

Hypocrites, too, in every age, praise the pious dead, and *hate the living* who act just as the pious dead acted. Matt. 23 : 29, 30. They commend good men, whose example and reproofs reach them not, and rail at those whose holy example before their eyes warns them of their guilt and danger. Is this my character ? I admire the intrepidity of Nathan in calling his backslidden monarch to repentance. Do I admire the man that cries in my ears, Return, O thou backslider, unto the Lord !

Excess and overacting attach to all hypocritical characters. Their prayers are too long—their zeal rises to fury—their moderation is indifference. When they would be wise, they are cunning. So in every thing. All is overacted.

Am I a hypocrite ? How momentous the question ! How immense the interest at stake ! Lord, "search me and know me, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting ;" leave me not to the surprise of coming wrath. "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul ?" Hypocrites shall "receive the greater damnation." Matt. 23 : 14. I cannot, I will not rest until I have good reason for saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things—thou knowest that I love thee."