

Grace for the Day

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Dealing with Hypocrisy: Research Notes

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Explanation

The framework used for this study is the *TDNT* with additional references used such as Lexicons, grammars, and concordances. They are always noted as this is not an article in its own right.

These notes represent the raw unprocessed data, background information, and the out-takes for the final version of the article. The content has been transliterated so people who do not know Greek or Hebrew can still follow along. The Greek and Hebrew texts are omitted. There are explanatory footnotes so we can understand some background references. These notes avoid excessive jargons, but it does use common abbreviations.

Webster's definition:

Hypocrisy: "a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess."

Hypocrite: "1. a person who pretends to have virtues, moral or religious beliefs, principles, etc., that he does not actually possess, esp. a person whose actions belie stated beliefs. 2. a person who feigns desirable or publicly approved attitude esp. one whose private life, opinions, or statements belie his or her public statements."

Development of the word

The English words hypocrite/hypocrisy come from the Greek language. This explains its paucity in the OT.

In **Classical Greek** (Attic), the verb *hypokrinomai* (verb) originally meant "to explain." This sense was retained in Hellenistic Greek (koine).¹ The noun which describes

¹ Classical Greek refers to the more literary Greek language used by the Greeks before the conquests of Alexander the Great (323 BC). Hellenistic Greek refers to the Greek spoken throughout the territories that were conquered. This was derived mainly from Attic Greek (= Greek used in Athens; as opposed to the Ionic Greek

the agent of the verb is *hypokritēs*. This is a person who explains a poet by dramatic and artistic recitation, using mime and gestures. The role in recitation and acting consolidated the meaning of *hypocritēs* as "an actor."

On rare occasions, it is used to mean "to answer" in the Ionic Greek dialect.² The noun *hypokrisis* is derived from the verb (in Ionic) to mean "answer."

In **Koine Greek**, the *hypokritēs* is valued for his elocution and rhetorical skills. He explains the author by giving the composition voice and personality. While the actor is pretending to be the author of the text, it is fully accepted as a role and not regarded as negative.

PE: A useful related term is the Latin *persona* (mask). The actor wears a mask (*persona*) and plays out a role.

PE: Shakespeare is certainly not the first to observe "All the world is a stage, and we are all merely actors." The people are aware that society plays out on stage and the stage reflects society. It is apparent that actors are not who they depict. Actors who play noble roles need not lead noble lives. After all, he is only an actor (*hypokritēs*), and he is play-acting.

The term shifted from a positive sense to also embrace a neutral and negative sense. In the negative sense, it points out the pretend character of the actor on stage against the actor in real life. This disparity between the actor's role and the actor himself generates a negative turn to the use of *hypokritēs*. The pretender in life is designated the actor (*hypokritēs*).

With this turn of use, the words *hypokrinomai* (vb); *hypokritēs* (verbal substantive); and *hypokrisis* (noun),

dialect). The Greek language was affected significantly in both vocabulary and syntax as it was adopted by different cultures and interacted with the languages of the conquered people. Hellenistic Greek became known as the "common" (*koinē*) Greek. The NT was written in koine Greek.

² Ionic Greek is from Ionia in Greece. It is the Greek used by Homer. This dialect spread during the Dorian invasion, and was used in the mainland of Greece and parts of Asia Minor before it was supplanted by Koine Greek during the Hellenistic period.

can be positive, neutral or negative in their ethical dimensions.

Jewish use of Koine Greek plays an important role in the use of *hypokritēs* in the NT as it represents the Hellenistic interaction with Jewish culture.

The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the OT and Apocrypha. It is important because it tells us how the Jews understood *hypokrinomai* and its cognates.

The term is used in the account of the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid Hellenization. Appollonius was pretending (*hypokritheis*) peace until the Sabbath so he could attack the Jews with minimum resistance (2 Macc 5:25). Eleazar was advised to pretend (*hypokrinesthai*) to eat pork but substitute it with clean meat (2 Macc 6:21). He rejected the proposal because his pretense (*hypokritēnai* and *hypokrisin*) would be a bad example for the younger people (2 Macc 6:24-5). The other uses of *hypokrinomai* and its cognates are consistently negative. It is used to represent apostasy under the guise of pretense or simply unethical pretense.³

The use of the term in Job 34:30; and 36:13 (variant in Isaiah 32:6) is interesting. The Job 34:30 speaks of the type of person who should not rule so he will not be a snare to the people. This person who does not qualify to rule is the *chanēf*. The context tells us he is a godless person, that is, a person who does not have the fear of God in him, a person who lives as though there is no God. There are several instances when this *chanēf* person is translated by the Greek *hypokrinomai/hypokrisis*. This meaning is unrelated to the existing Greek use of *hypokrivomai/hypokrisis*, and it appears to retain its Hebrew meaning transplanted into a Greek word.

“In Philo and Josephus, *hypokrinomai/hypokrisis* is almost always used in a negative sense” with the exception of warfare when Josephus allows it.⁴ It is quite apparent even today that successful deception in warfare is a virtue and not a vice.

The Jewish use of *hypokrinomai/hypokrisis* was a significant departure from Classical and Hellenistic use. The most common use of this term suggests a pretense in obeying God or denial of God using pretense as an excuse. This is a common dilemma among those suffering persecution for their faith. “Can I comply with the outward ritualistic demands of idolatry, atheism (or

whatever the demand may be) but remain inwardly true to God?” Diaspora Jews call that deception *hypokrinomai*. This is not a strategy of survival, but apostasy.

The second use of *hypokrinomai/hypokrisis* is an even more radical departure from the first use which retains the core idea of “pretense.” The second use ascribes the Hebrew idea of *chanēf* (godlessness) to the term.

The NT uses this word frequently.⁵ Like the use among Hellenistic Jews, it is also used in a negative sense. It is most frequently found in the mouth of Jesus.

(1) This term is most frequently used on those who use external religiosity to conceal their true spiritual bankruptcy. (a) giving, praying and fasting for show in place of their true spiritual content (Matt 6:2, 5, 16). (b) Giving money to religious use as an excuse for neglecting parents (Matt 15:7); (c) showy prayers in place of compassionate dealing with the widows (Matt 23:14 [variant]); (d) tithing but neglecting justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matt 23:23); (d) external cleanliness but internal sinfulness (Matt 23:25,27,28; Mk 7:6); (e) honoring prophets after they are murdered by the community (Matt 23:29); (f) ignoring the needs of a person while acknowledging the needs of an animal (Lk 13:15).

(2) The term is used for those who accuse in others what they excuse in themselves. (a) ignoring the plank while picking out the speck (Matt 7:5; Lk 6:42).

(3) Pretense or duplicity. (a) pretending to ask a question to entrap Jesus (Matt 22:18; Mk 12:15).

(4) Insincerity or lying (Rm 12:9; 1 Tim 4:2; Jas 3:17).

(5) Those who go in the way of apostasy (Matt 23:13,15; Gal 2:13).

The core issue with the term is inconsistency. There is an inconsistency between the internal content, character, purpose or intention of a person and the façade presented to the public. This invariably involves pretense at some point.

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³ Following is a complete listing of all LXX occurrences of the *hypokri-* root, including the different recensions, as listed in Hatch-Redpath, 1414: (1) *hypokrinesthai*: Job 39:32 (40:2); Sir 1:29; 35 (32):15; 36(33):2; 2 Mac 5:25; 6:21,24; 4 Mac 6:15,17; [Sm Prov 16:28]; (2) *hypokrisis*: 2 Mac 6:25; [Aq Th Isa 32:6]; [Sm Psa 34(35):16; Isa 32:6]; (3) *hypokritēs*: Job 34:30; 36:13; [Aq. Job 15:34; 20:5; Prov 11:9; Isa 33:14]; [Sm Prov 11:9; Isa 33:14; Hos 6:9]; [Th. Job 15:34; 36:13; Prov 11:9; Isa 33:14]. .

⁴ TDNT, 8.565 for details.

⁵ Comprehensive list:

Examination of occurrences in the NT

Mt 6:2	So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 6:5	And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 6:16	When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 7:5	Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You <u>hypocrite</u> , first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.	accusing others while excusing self
Lk 6:42	⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.	accusing others while excusing self
Mt 15:7	⁵ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' ⁶ he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. ⁷ You <u>hypocrites!</u> Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ "These people honor me with their lips, / but their hearts are far from me.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 22:18	¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"	Hypocrites: (1) pretending to ask a question / pretexting; (2)
Mt 23:13	"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.	apostate
Mt 23:14 ⁶	NASB. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 23:15	"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.	apostate
Mt 23:23	²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 23:25	"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 23:27	²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.

⁶ Variant Reading.

Mt 23:28	²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 23:29	²⁹ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mt 24:51	⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.	non indicative
Mk 7:6	⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" ⁶ He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.	external religiosity in place of true spirituality.
Mk 12:15	Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it."	hypocrisy = duplicity
Lk 12:1	Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.	non indicative
Lk 12:56	⁵⁴ He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. ⁵⁵ And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?	inconsistent application of effort?
Lk 13:15	¹⁵ The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?"	inconsistent application of rules of conduct.?
Rm 12:9	NASB. Let love be without <u>hypocrisy</u> . Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.	pretense?
Ga 2:13	¹³ The other Jews joined him in his <u>hypocrisy</u> , so that by their <u>hypocrisy</u> even Barnabas was led astray.	inconsistent personal conduct?
1 Tim 4:2	The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through <u>hypocritical</u> liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.	non indicative
Jas 3:17	NASB. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.	inconsistency?
1 Pet 2:1	Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.	not indicative

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