

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin by telling you what a young attorney friend of mine did years ago. He saw a young woman on a jury, thought she was nice-looking, and asked her out. After several dates, he stopped by her apartment one day to give her flowers. His visit though was unannounced and he saw her for the first time without makeup on as a result. He didn't even recognize her, he told me later. So, he gave her the flowers, walked away, and abruptly broke up with her the very next day.

That young woman wore too much makeup and you know what, many of us do too. I'm speaking figuratively of course, not literally. Many of us don't disclose what we really are. We conceal it instead. We need to take off our makeup and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn to the passage I read earlier, 1 Peter 1:22-2:3.

## **Conceal**

Let's start with verse 23. Peter alludes to the words of Jesus in John 3:3 and talks about being born again. When we decide to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit enters into us and works there. The term "born again" refers to the results of His work. Those results are a new nature and thus a new life. There are different means by which the Holy Spirit achieves that, one of which Peter mentions in verses 23-25. It's Father God's living and enduring word, the Bible.

Now look at the word "brethren" in verse 22. It teaches that the Holy Spirit not only creates born again individuals. He creates a born again community as well, made up of those individuals. It's a closely-knit, supernaturally sustained community in which agape love prevails.

But while the Holy Spirit sustains it, the individuals who make it up must cooperate with His work in doing so. On the positive side, in verse 2, they must long for the pure milk of the word, referring back to verses 23-25. That means study the Bible. On the negative side, in verse 1, they must "put aside" five things: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and

slander. That means get rid of those things from their lives.

Today, I'm going to focus on one of the five, "hypocrisy." The Greek word translated that originally referred to an actor playing a part on the stage. Over time though, it eventually became associated with a person playing a part in his relationships. The actor presents himself to an audience as a person he isn't. In the same way, the hypocrite presents himself to others as a person he isn't. He pretends to be what he is not. Or he pretends not to be what he is.

That's hypocrisy and it's all too common in the community of God. It was 2000 years ago when Peter wrote verse 1 and still is today. It is because we're ashamed and afraid. We're ashamed of what we are and afraid that others will despise and reject us if they know it. So, we spend our lives concealing ourselves from them, hiding what we truly think, feel, and do. They in turn do the same thing with us.

The tendency to do that is so strong that psychologists sometimes speak of the "imposter's phenomenon." "Imposters phenomenon" refers to the universal sense that at some level, I'm faking it – the universal sense that if others knew that truth about me, the jig would be up.

Irving Goffman discusses just that in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. He argues that we're all actors. We all spend our entire lives playing dramatic roles that conceal who we really are. We show ourselves as having qualities we know others will admire and love. But in reality we may not have those qualities at all. We're conning people. He goes on to say that we're nothing more than the sum total of all the phony con jobs we've pulled off in our social interactions.

There is some truth to that. "Hypocrisy" does describe the life most of us are living. We're wearing makeup. We're ashamed and afraid and so conceal what we really are from others.

## **Disclose**

But we shouldn't. Peter's command in verse 1 is simple and to the point. Put aside hypocrisy. That means take off our makeup and make

ourselves known to others. Disclose what we really are – what we truly think, feel, do.

Many years ago, I was in a Bible study group with eight other people. After several months, we had gotten quite comfortable and close - so much so that something happened one night I'll never forget. A group member suddenly began crying as we were studying a text. We asked her what was wrong and she told us. She had doubts about the Bible. She was ashamed to admit it, she said, but she just couldn't believe that it's the inspired and inerrant word of God.

That's illustrates what it means to take off our makeup. We make ourselves known to others. We disclose what we really are, what we truly think, feel, and do.

### Why We Should Disclose

But why should we do that? It's a difficult thing to do and sometimes backfires on us. So why take the chance and do it?

I'll tell you why. It's because disclosure is essential to love. Notice the first word in verse 1, "therefore." That word connects what Peter says in verse 1 with the community of love he mentions in verse 22. His message is this. Hypocrisy diminishes, and if it's pervasive enough, destroys community. Agape love cannot prevail among those who practice it. Hear that again and don't ever forget it. Agape love cannot prevail among those who practice hypocrisy.

But it can among those who practice disclosure and here's why. It because of what it does. It draws people to us. In his book *Everybody's Normal till You Get to Know Them*, John Ortberg mentions Pope John XXIII as an example of that. Pope John was at a tea party one time when a woman wearing a low-cut dress walked in. He commented about it afterward: **"One of the hardest things about being pope is – usually if a woman like that walks into a party, everybody looks at her. If I'm at the party and a woman like that walks in – everybody looks at me."** That candid comment showed his willingness to disclose. The

result, according to Ortberg, was that he was one of the most beloved religious leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He elicited warmth from people everywhere he went.

That illustrates what disclosure does. It draws people to us. It's one of the great ironies of life. We wear makeup to impress people but they're drawn to us only when we take it off.

But they're not only drawn to us; they become open to us as well. It's a fundamental principle of human relationships, "**Disclosure begets disclosure.**" One therapist, for instance, claims that there's one way more than any other to get a client to open up. It's to tell him a secret that he could hurt the therapist with if he revealed it. He's right because disclosure begets disclosure. When we make ourselves known to others, they feel free to make themselves known to us.

And that goes to the very core of love. Ortberg explains the dynamics of it well: "**You cannot be fully loved if you are not fully known. You can only be loved to the extent that you are known. You can only be completely loved if you are completely known.**"

He's absolutely right. And that's why we need to disclose. It's essential to community. The Holy Spirit wants to create a community of love among us. But He can't unless we're willing to disclose.

### **How We Should Disclose**

Now that we know why we should disclose, let's examine how. I'd quickly say that there are times when we shouldn't disclose – when we should conceal instead.

One of those is when disclosure would cause more harm than good - would hurt more than help. I remember when I my wife came home with a permanent and curly hair. She happily asked me, "**Do you like it?**" but I didn't. I hated it in fact. I felt like asking her, "**What were you thinking?**" But I didn't because it would have hurt her. Beside, discretion is the better part of valor. Anyway, the rule of thumb is this. Don't disclose when doing so would cause more harm than good – when

the loss to God, others, or even us would outweigh the gain. We shouldn't lie. But we can evade or be superficial or vague.

There's another time when we shouldn't disclose. It's when the person to whom we'd be disclosing is untrustworthy. This is so obvious it hardly needs mentioning. It's in some people to share secrets, to betray confidences. It only makes sense, therefore, not to share secrets with or entrust confidences to them.

But apart from those times, we should take off our makeup and disclose ourselves to others. We do that in two ways.

The first is to be transparent and without guile in the routines and relationships of our everyday lives.

The problem is that most of us are far too concerned about people's approval to be that. We want everyone to think well of us and conceal what we really are so that they will. We manage what people think and feel about us by pretending to be what we aren't or not be what we are.

We need to take off our makeup and be transparent and without guile in our everyday lives. We do that by following five basic principles: (1) Don't emphasize opinions that we think people might agree with; (2) Don't tell stories that make us sound more intelligent, talented, and successful than we are; (3) Don't hide or manage or put a positive spin on what we did wrong; (4) Don't hold back contrary opinions when we should honestly express them; and (5) Don't pretend to have thoughts and feelings about things that we don't really have.

Take the third of those. The Holy Spirit has shown me something about myself. When I make a mistake or do something wrong, I often hide it one of two ways. I either defend it or try to put a positive spin on it. But doing that isn't conducive to either discipleship or community. So, I've taken off the makeup.

I once knocked a brand new bread maker off of the table, for instance, and broke it. My first impulse, I confess, was to defend myself to my wife, to say she shouldn't have put it on the edge of the table. But I didn't. I disclosed myself instead. I admitted that it was my fault;

that I knocked it off because, as usual, I was in too big of a hurry.

That demonstrates one way that we disclose ourselves to others. It's by being transparent and without guile in our everyday lives.

The second way is by revealing to others what makes us the most vulnerable. We unveil to them what the 12<sup>th</sup> century abbot Aelred of Rievaulx called "the secrets of the heart." Those secrets include painful things. I was in a small group once in which a young woman shared her deepest embarrassment and hurt. "I'm ugly," she said. They also include sinful things. In that same small group, a man admitted to using pornography on a regular basis.

Whatever they are, it's a fact that all of us have secrets of the heart. It's also a fact that most of us hide them. We suffer though when we do. That's because there's no healing in hiding. As Psalm 32:3 makes perfectly clear, there's only sickness instead.

But there is healing in disclosing. Research, for instance, indicates a definite connection between self-disclosure and physical health. People who reveal their flaws and sins experience short and long-term physical gains. It isn't just physical healing though. It's spiritual and psychological healing as well. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about just that: **"A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself. He experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person."**

The point is that there's healing in disclosing. So let's selectively disclose the secrets of our heart to others. There is a risk in doing so of course. Someone may despise and reject us. That's the risk but the prize, healing and love, makes the risk worth taking.

## **Conclusion**

So make the movement toward self-disclosure. Find several someone's in your life to whom you can disclose yourself, perhaps in one of the small groups we make available to you. Then do it. Take off your makeup and be real. You'll find healing and love if you do.