



WORD STUDY Chap. VII, 33-38
OF
HUPOKRISIS (ὕποκρισις)
AND
ERITHEIA (ἐριθεία)



by Hans Mast



Galatians, Philemon, Colossians, and Philipians

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Hypokrisis – ὑπόκρισις – Galatians 2:13

Introduction

Peter, Barnabas, and others were engaged in something that we often do. They hung out with the popular crowd. They hung out with the respectable crowd. They hung out with the Christians who knew the Scriptures the best. Doesn't sound too bad does it? I do it. You do it.

What did God think?

Paul said that he “had to openly oppose [Peter] because he was completely wrong” (Galatians 2:11 GW). The KJV says, “he was to be blamed”. And what was Peter's crime? It is the crime given in the first paragraph. So, one might suppose Paul gently rebuked Peter for this easily made mistake. Quite the opposite! In Galatians 2:13, he called him literally a “hypocrite”!

One of the most shocking things to me through this word study is the severity of the sin that Peter and the others were committing and the horribleness that was embodied in the word that Paul used to describe this sin.

Meaning of the Greek Word

The word ὑπόκρισις (*hypokrisis*) which is translated dissimulation is really the etymological root word of the English word hypocrisy (*Encarta*). For ease of faithfulness to the Greek text, one will not find an easier word to translate. It means simply hypocrisy. However, when one looks at the simplest dictionary meaning of the Koine Greek word, it is a bit puzzling unless you understand the word's history and common usage. The simplest meaning of the word is simply “an answer”. Here's what Strong's and Thayer's have to say:

Strong's Definition:

From G5271; *acting under* a feigned part; that is, (figuratively) *deceit* (“hypocrisy”): - condemnation, dissimulation, hypocrisy. (Strong)

Thayer's Definition:

- 1) an answering
- 2) an answer
- 3) the acting of a stage player
- 4) dissimulation, hypocrisy (Thayer)

Vine's tells us that it has the idea of a response given by an actor (Vine).

Wuest's Word Studies tells us that if you break the word down into its components, it means literally “to answer from under [a mask]” (the mask is implied) (Wuest, 1:72-73).



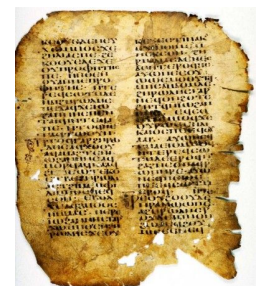
The noun ὑπόκρισις (*hupokrisis*), which means hypocrisy, comes from the verb ὑποκρίνομαι (*hupokrinomai*) which means “to decide (speak or act) under a false part”, or more plainly



“to act in hypocrisy”. Also intricately related is the noun ὑποκριτής (*hupokrites*) which technically means “an actor under an assumed character”, but which simply means “hypocrite”. So we have three forms of the word: *hupokrisis* (hypocrisy), *hupokrinomai* (to act in hypocrisy), and *hupokrites* (hypocrite).

Secular Usage

Some Greek text or philosopher (Luc. Icaromenipp.) uses the word to “compare false philosophers to actors whose mask and fine costume have been stripped off and the true self remains.” (Kittel, 8:559-570)



Old Testament Usage

There is no LXX usage of this Greek word. However, there is one instance of a Hebrew word being translated to English as “hypocrisy”:

For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise
 תנף *hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry,*
and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. (Isaiah 32:6 KJV)

New Testament Usage

Jesus used this same word in condemning the Pharisees as hypocrites in Matthew 23:

*“How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You **hypocrites (hupokrites)**! You give God one-tenth of your mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the most important things in Moses' Teachings. You should have done these things without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain gnats out of your wine, but you swallow camels. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You **hypocrites (hupokrites)**! You clean the outside of cups and dishes. But inside they are full of greed and uncontrolled desires. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cups and dishes so that the outside may also be clean. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You **hypocrites (hupokrites)**! You are like whitewashed graves that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and every kind of impurity. So on the outside you look as though you have God's approval, but inside you are full of **hypocrisy (hupokrisis)** and lawlessness. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You **hypocrites (hupokrites)**! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the monuments of those who had God's approval. Then you say, 'If we had lived at the time of our ancestors, we would not have helped to murder the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, finish what your ancestors started! You snakes! You poisonous snakes! How can you escape being condemned to hell?” (Matthew 23:23-33 GW)*

Ouch! This was not an unfamiliar word to the disciple Peter. He was there when Jesus said the above. He was quite familiar with what Jesus thought of hypocrisy. This was a very scathing, loaded word for Paul to have used!

Jesus also said, “**Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (*hupokrisis*).**” in (Luke 12:1 KJV).

This was not the only time that Jesus used the word *hupokrisis* (or *hupokrites* or *hupokrinomai*) along with colorful condemnational language. Here are some more references: Matthew 6:1-2, 5; 6:16; 7:5; 15:7-10; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13-33; 24:51; Mark 7:6; Luke 6:42; 11:44; 12:15; 12:56; 13:15; 20:20; John 1:50

Paul used the word in I Timothy 4:1-2 (KJV): “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking *lies* in **hypocrisy (*hupokrisis*)**; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;” “Lies!” Ouch!

James used (James 5:12) the word *hupokrisis* to describe why that Christians shouldn't perform oaths because failing to keep the oath would make the believer fall into *hupokrisis* (hypocrisy).

I Peter 2:1 includes *hupokrisis* as a sin to be laid aside.

Application and Conclusion

A side note to this whole incident is its efficacy in showing that Peter (much less his putative successors) did not have supremacy and infallibility as claimed by the Roman Catholics. Paul said that “[Peter] was to blame” and that he was promulgating and executing wrong theology (Henry).

So we see that Paul was using no polite word when he said that Peter and Barnabas were

engaging in dissimulation. Paul said it just like it was. They were engaging in a gross violation of Christian liberty all because of their fear of the Judaizers—their simple fear of what other people thought.

This was an especial blow when Barnabas did this because he was second to only Paul in reaching the Gentiles. He was also Paul's personal friend, companion, and confidante. So this was a personal betrayal, not just an academic theological dispute.

For us today, it is incredibly easy to not hang out with and fellowship with fellow believers who don't follow traditional Mennonite traditions and customs (or even if they do, if they are not of Mennonite ethnicity). One does not need to get into the specifics of these traditions to simply say that those of NMB (Non-Mennonite Background) are exactly like the Gentiles that Peter was not eating with. We talk about the “English” (the NMBs) just as the Jews talked about the uncircumcised. If we treat NMBs any different than John-Mary's Jacob Miller, we are sinning in a most despicable way and are *hypokrites* of the lowest order. We need a Paul to withstand us to our face and tell us that we are to blame. We need a Jesus to tell us that we are a generation of vipers. We actually have Paul and Jesus to tell us that, but too often Paul and Jesus sit on the bookshelf covered in dust. Or perhaps we hear Paul and Jesus—in fact we memorize them ardently—but we pray with the Pharisee, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men.” (Luke 18:11 KJV)

Eritheia – ἐριθεία – Philippians 2:3

Introduction

Paul, in Philippians 2:3, is addressing a problem that has been around since Creation: a lust for power that doesn't mind sinning to get it. This is a somewhat misleading verse if one reads it only in the KJV, because the KJV translates the word poorly, ambiguously, and improperly as “strife”. So what does eritheia really mean?

Meaning of the Greek Word

Strong's definition:

Perhaps from the same as G2042; properly *intrigue*, that is, (by implication) *faction* (Strong)

Thayer's definition:

1) electioneering or intriguing for office

1a) apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward,

a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts

1b) partisanship, fractiousness

Part of Speech: noun feminine (Thayer)

The meaning of the Greek word is given above; it's hard to add to much to it, but to resummairize: working to elevate yourself to a position of greater power, rather than striving for the common good. Playing politician and seeking personal gain in a place that you shouldn't be doing so.

Secular Usage

Kittel (1:660) writes that Aristotle (the most famous and influential Greek philosopher) used *eritheia* when he wrote in Pol., V, 3, p. 1303a, 13 ff. to describe someone who was procuring public office by illegally manipulating the process. He used the word to refer to the attitude or spirit of what they were doing rather than a specific action.

Kittel (1:660) also writes (and cites Ditt. Syll.³, 526, n. 8 (3rd cent. B.C.)) that *eritheia* was used in the civic oath of the Itanians: "I will not on any pretext bring a charge of failure to keep civic law against any citizen for personal reasons." The key portion of this oath lies in the word *eritheia*; it says basically that "I will not bring a charge that is motivated by *eritheia*." Using the legal system of the state—authority greater than themselves and meant

for the common good—for personal revenge or personal advancement was strictly forbidden.

Kittel (1:660) records that Polybius (200?-118? B.C.; a Greek historian who wrote the 40 volume *Universal History* about the history of Roman conquest between 264 and 146 B.C. (*Encarta*)) used *eritheia* in X, 22:9 and in V, 2, p. 1302b, 4 to discuss someone influencing others for their own interest.

Kittel (1:660) also tells us that Philo (20 B.C.-A.D. 50; from Alexandria, Egypt, the greatest Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher of his age (*Encarta*)) used *eritheia* in Leg. Gaj., 68 to exhort leaders be without personal ambition, and instead work for the common good.

Old Testament Usage

A Concordance of the Septuagint (Morrish) gives only one reference, Isaiah 38:12, for the word which is found in its masculine form. However, it is impossible to correlate the Greek word used in Isa. 38:12 in the LXX to either its original Hebrew or the translated English.

While discussing *eritheia*'s somewhat muddy etymology, Kittel (1:660) mentions three verses (Ezekiel 23:5, 9, 12) which contain derivatives (whether derivatives of tense, voice, and gender only or whether derivatives combining other words, I was unable to ascertain) of the word. As used in Ezekiel, it refers to a harlot who commits immoral sexual acts for personal pleasure. This parallels the concept of sinning for personal gain, as used in the NT.

New Testament Usage

Wherever there is jealousy and rivalry (eritheia), there is disorder and every kind of evil. (James 3:16 GW)

Here we see that *eritheia* is more than simply a sin of itself, but it is also a great impetus and catalyst for other sins. We also see the parallel construction here that equates jealousy and *eritheia*. Jealousy is an integral and key component of *eritheia*.

But the others are insincere. They tell the message about Christ out of selfish

ambition (eritheia) in order to stir up trouble for me while I'm in prison. (Philippians 1:17 GW)

Paul uses this word elsewhere in Philippians when he speaks of people who are taking advantage of his imprisonment to try to elevate themselves in church position and prestige. It is a common adage that the most opportune time to ascend to power is when the current leader is in a position of weakness. That's what these immature Christians were doing—kicking Paul while he was down in order to elevate themselves.

He will give everlasting life to those who search for glory, honor, and immortality by persisting in doing what is good. But he will bring anger and fury on those who, in selfish pride (eritheia), refuse to believe the truth and who follow what is wrong. (Rom 2:7-8 GW)

Here we have a clear-cut condemnation of *eritheia* as a horrible sin.

Application and Conclusion

Reader's Digest published the following unattributed quote (*Quotes*) which sums up perfectly (even down to the Christian liberty that salvation brings!) what Paul was trying to say: “The love of liberty is the love of others; the love of power is the love of ourselves.” Indeed, those that were preaching the Gospel to honor God and to bring others to Christian liberty loved others (God and fellowmen) but those that preached the Gospel to increase their own power and prestige loved only themselves. It also reminds me of something Abraham Lincoln said: “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.” (*Quotes*)

So, what have we learned about *eritheia*? Aristotle showed us that it is an attitude, not a specific action. The Itanian oath showed us that it was using a higher authority, which is meant for the common good, for personal revenge. Polybius showed us that it is influencing others for our own interest. Philo especially admonished leaders to be without *eritheia*—personal ambition—and instead work for the common good. Ezekiel gave a graphic example

of *eritheia* (which is used often throughout the rest of Scripture) as being a whoring of oneself for temporary pleasure. James told us that it causes a multitude of other sins and includes jealousy. Philippians shows us that it involves selfishly stirring up trouble for someone when they are weak. Finally, Romans comes in loudly, clearly, and unambiguously that *eritheia* is sin.

This is a disturbingly common sin for myself and many others. The attitude sins, in general, are always harder to identify—this one is especially so because it usually involves doing really good things... but for the wrong reasons. How many thousands of times have I done something good to increase my prestige? How many hundreds of times have I done something good, which if I would have done it differently would have been more advantageous for God and others but at the expense of personal glory, vanity, and advancement? How many times has this caused other problems? These are all rhetorical questions with very high numbers as their answers.

Paul goes on in Philippians 2 to give the solution for this problem: the humility of Jesus Christ. He was the ultimate example of humility and sacrificing his own glory, honor, and prestige for the common good of all. Paul explains in detail how the most powerful being in all existence became the most humble of them all for our salvation and for our example. We must totally throw out any ideas of striving for personal advancement. We must totally throw out any ideas of striving for high position. We must totally throw out any ideas of striving to look good. We must NEVER push others down to get ahead.

We must plead with Jesus for humility, daily give up our rights, and make our decisions based only upon others' benefit and the glory of God.

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