

When I was about six years old, the Civil War Centennial celebration began, and I became quite an enthusiast. During this time, I decided that I would build a cannon to use in my mock battles. I didn't really have any suitable materials, so I had to take four flat boards and build a cannon with a square cross section. It sounds ridiculous, but using my imagination I could get by with something that was only the impression of the real thing. This is what creative play is all about.

This ability to be satisfied with an illusion of what is really the truth affect us sometimes in the way that we live our lives. We may be able to deal with the illusion temporarily in such a way that we are happy with it, but in some higher sense we know that it really isn't real.

In addition to a fine cannon, I had a Confederate General's shirt that my mom made me. It had a stripe down the sleeve and everything. The wearing of a uniform enhanced the feeling that I was really playing a part of some actual character. I didn't have to have the pants, or the shoes, or the gloves; the shirt was enough in my play-acting.

When we think of the word 'hypocrite', we think of someone who is just playing a part, who pretends to be something that he isn't. Does this definition apply to my childhood play? Does it apply to adults who wear full Civil War uniforms in a re-enactment event? Or is there something more fundamental to be considered?

As a child General, I would have loved to have an army at my command, with soldiers who respectfully looked to me for their battle orders. But I knew that it was all make-believe, and I could let it go at the end of the day. Similarly, the re-enactors may have temporary command, but they also know that it vaporizes at the end of the weekend.

The key is what have in our heart, and whether we pretend to be righteous in order to feel superior to others. I knew that my shirt and my cannon were not real and therefore not worth very much. But sometimes when we think of our spiritual worth, we forget that we are no better than anyone else. We try to maintain the illusion of righteousness; but to others we are like the emperor who wore no clothes.

Are we pretending to be Christians? And in doing that, do we look as absurd to the world as someone playing with a square cannon? In the show that we put on, and in our efforts to act out the part of being a child of God, we may look just as silly. I hope that we can understand why.

God continually encourages us to be like Him, and to act like Him. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus tells us to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". God knows that we cannot achieve perfection, but He still wants us to strive for that goal. This is not hypocrisy in and of itself. We must make sure that we realize our place, and not make others feel worthless in our own pursuit of righteousness.

The beauty of Grace is that if we are sincerely playing the part, God will transform us into something real, like in the story of the Velveteen Rabbit. We are made perfect by the way God loves us, and He then treats us as though we are righteous. We may still look silly to others, but to God we are no longer an illusion. We have become His.