



March 4, 2026

MESSENGER

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CATFISHING --- A NEW NAME FOR AN OLD VICE

“Catfishing” in modern society means creating a false online identity designed to deceive others, often for the purpose of romance, fraud, or personal gain. Using a combination of fake photos, made-up bios and creative social media posts, a person tries to create a fictional self who, over time, develops on-line relationships that can meet personal needs, but also may result in some form of exploitation. Stories abound of people whose hearts have been broken or bank accounts have been emptied by catfishing.

The need to create an upgraded online persona is very strong among young people growing up today, as Loma Linda University Behavioral Health faculty member Alyssa Acosta says in a recent article entitled, “The Impacts of Social Media on Youth Self Image”:

“Social media platforms are flooded with meticulously curated profiles, showcasing seemingly perfect lives, flawless appearances and ideal bodies. This constant exposure to seemingly perfect individuals can lead young people to develop unrealistic expectations about their own appearance and life achievements. Comparing oneself to these distorted representations can lead to feelings of inadequacy, lowered self-esteem and even body dysmorphia.”¹

An older, more traditional form of catfishing is called **hypocrisy** --- pretending to be someone you aren't. It's been pretty common in religious circles all the way back to Jesus' time, and he condemned it harshly.²

*Hypocrisy is a combination of two Greek words: hypo, which means “under,” and crisy, which means judge (see the English “criticize”). A hypocrite under-judges himself. That's one way a self-doubting person can feel more adequate. The other way is to over-judge others, described by the Greek word **hypercrisis**, which can be translated into English as judgmentalism. In Greek, hyper (over) is the opposite of hypo (under). You may try to feel relatively better about yourself either by under-judging yourself (hypocritical) or by over-judging others (hypercritical). By making yourself look better or by making others look worse. Catfishing!*

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Jesus combined both ideas --- under-judging yourself and over-judging others --- in this famous teaching:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For the judgment you give will be the judgment you get, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

The only way we can keep a balance between hypocrisy and judgmentalism is by being exactly who we are and allowing others to be exactly who they are. That can't be done by comparing ourselves to one another, but it can be done by looking into the mirror of the Bible and seeing the ideal Image of God deep within each of us. Then we'll all be so busy confessing our personal shortcomings that we will be blind to the shortcomings of others around us.

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ <https://news.llu.edu/health-wellness/impacts-social-media-youth-self-image>

² Matthew 6:5, 16; 23:24, 37.