

The Danger of Hypocrisy

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Date: 27 January 2019

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[0 : 00] to hear and to understand and to respond in faith and trust to your word today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke chapter 11.

We are going through the middle part of the Gospel of Luke this winter. Today we are looking at the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12, starting at chapter 11, verse 37.

If you are looking in the Pew Bible, the page number is listed in the bulletin. 817, thanks. So Luke chapter 11, starting at verse 37.

Let me read this passage to us this morning. While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table.

The Pharisee was astonished to see that Jesus did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

[1 : 19] You fools! Did not he who make the outside make the inside also? But give his alms those things that are within. And behold, everything is clean for you.

But woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe, mint, and rue, and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves. And people walk over them without knowing it.

One of the lawyers answered him, Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also. And he said, Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses, and you consent to the deeds of your fathers. For they killed them, and you build their tombs.

[2 : 22] Therefore also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say.

In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

[3 : 30] I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God.

But the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

[4 : 35] One of the most common reasons why people leave the church or never darken the door of a church is because they have seen too much hypocrisy inside it.

I was talking to a small business owner recently. He said, the worst customer I had to deal with last year was a pastor of a Baptist church. I lost over \$10,000 because he lied and never paid what he owed.

Sadly, that's far from the worst example. In the past few years, I can think of several prominent evangelical Christian leaders who have stepped down or been removed from their positions because of moral failures, often relating to money, sex, or power.

Many of these things had been going on for years before they got called out. Earlier this month, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford released the list of priests who had been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors in the diocese since its founding in 1953.

48 priests. Some of you have experienced these things personally or in your families. You know the damage that can be done to human beings made in the image of God and to the reputation of God himself when those who claim to represent God act in deeply ungodly ways.

[6 : 06] Jesus knows that too. In the passage we're looking at this morning, Jesus addresses the issue of hypocrisy, specifically religious hypocrisy.

And we see how deeply Jesus cares for those harmed by it because of how strongly he rebuked those who perpetuated it.

These are some of Jesus' strongest words of rebuke recorded in any of the Gospels. This morning, I want us to look at three things. First, I want us to look at Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees and their hypocrisy.

Second, I want to look at Jesus' warning to his followers to beware of the danger of hypocrisy. And third, I want to look at the remedy Jesus gives to counter hypocrisy.

So first, Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees' hypocrisy. We see this in the end of chapter 11. Now, the context for this scene is Jesus is teaching the crowds, and a Pharisee who was listening invited him over for a meal.

[7 : 21] Now, the Pharisees were a highly respected and widely influential group in Jesus' time. They were a relatively small group. Josephus, the historian, says that they numbered about 6,000, just about 1% of the Jewish population.

But he says they were very influential among the common people. And after Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 A.D., the Pharisee movement developed into what we now know as rabbinic Judaism.

Broadly speaking, the Pharisees and Jesus would have agreed about many things. They were committed to the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible. They diligently studied it and sought to put it into practice.

They affirmed core biblical doctrines, God's sovereignty and human responsibility, the reality of angels and demons, the hope of the bodily resurrection. They were not a political party either. They were willing to work with whoever was in power.

They only wanted freedom to follow God's laws as they understood them. Now, the Pharisees were not the only Jewish group at that time. There were also several others, including the Herodians who were allies of the ruling dynasty, the Sadducees, worldly aristocrats who controlled the temple, the Essenes who went out into the desert and lived separately in communes, and the Zealots who wanted to promote, advocated violent revolution against the Roman government.

[8 : 44] And so of all the Jewish groups, you would think that Jesus and the Pharisees shared most in common. But what we see in the Gospels is that Jesus and the Pharisees were often deeply at odds with each other.

Jesus interacted with the Pharisees more than any of these other groups, 25 times just in Luke's Gospel. But he also criticized the Pharisees more than any other group.

And here Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Verse 38, the Pharisee was astonished that Jesus did not first wash before eating.

Now, the Pharisees were not concerned about the spread of germs. That was not the concern back in the first century. And they even used such a small amount of water that it wouldn't have made a difference.

They were concerned, though, about ritual purity. You see, the Pharisees were careful to obey not only the biblical laws, but also the oral traditions that had developed over time that were seen as sort of safeguards or fences to keep someone from breaking the law by mistake.

[9 : 57] In the case of handwashing, the Old Testament law only required handwashing in two instances. After a person touched a bodily discharge or before priests ate the holy offerings.

But the Pharisees required it before all meals, especially after interacting with crowds who were seen as sort of suspect and unclean, and in many other contexts. 25% of the Mishnah, which is a later compilation of Jewish oral traditions, is concerned with ritual washing and bathing.

So it was a major concern of the Pharisees. And they were scrupulous about it. Jesus did not share the Pharisees' concern for ritual cleanliness.

See, one of the most important differences between Jesus and the Pharisees is that Jesus was committed to upholding the authority of the Bible, but he was not committed to upholding all of the traditions that had accumulated over the years around the Bible.

And Jesus' concern was that the Pharisees' emphasis on ritual purity had undermined their commitment and the Bible's emphasis on moral integrity.

[11 : 08] And so Jesus publicly and provocatively confronted the Pharisees. It's hard to overstate how provocative Jesus was in this context.

I mean, think about it. He's invited to somebody's house, and he knows that it's customary to do the ritual washing, but he doesn't do it. And then when he sees his host's evident surprise and dismay, he starts blasting the Pharisees for their lack of integrity.

He completely disregards the social conventions of politeness. You look all put together on the outside, and you're a mess on the inside, you fools. You need a clean heart, not just clean hands.

Woe to you. Imagine if you invited someone over for dinner, and they started talking like that.

And then after hearing Jesus' three woes on the Pharisees, a lawyer speaks up. Now, he's not a lawyer like we think of, a prosecutor or a defense attorney. This was a scribe, a law scholar, a scholar of the Old Testament law.

[12 : 24] And you might say that the scribes or the lawyers, the two words are sort of interchangeable. They were sort of the academic prowess behind the Pharisee movement, and the Pharisees were the ones who sort of relied on their exegesis and study and interpretation and taught the people.

But Jesus didn't let them off the hook either. He pronounced three woes on the scribes in verses 46 to 52. You heap on burdens, and you don't help a bit.

You honor the prophets, but only if they're already dead, not if they're living and speaking to you. And instead of opening the door to God, you are blocking it. In each series, if you notice, the third and final woe, verses 44 and 52, focuses on how the hypocrisy of religious leaders negatively impacts those who follow them and hinders them.

Now, you might say, why did Jesus say all this? It wasn't because Jesus delighted in creating a ruckus and telling people off.

It wasn't because he was hungry and frustrated and needed to vent. No, it's because Jesus saw that something much more important than politeness was at stake.

[13 : 39] It's because Jesus was not only the Pharisees' guest, he was also the Pharisees' Lord. You see, all along, if you read the Gospel of Luke up to this point, all along, the Pharisees and the scribes have heard Jesus' teaching.

They've seen Jesus' healing. And all along, they've been accusing him in their hearts and grumbling about him behind his back. Chapter 5, verse 21 and 22, they questioned in their hearts when Jesus had healed a paralyzed man.

Chapter 5, verse 30, they grumbled at his disciples when Jesus went to Levi, the tax collector's house. Chapter 6, verse 7, they watched Jesus to find a reason to accuse him.

Chapter 10, verse 25 and 29, one of them tested Jesus wanting to justify himself. So, after forbearing with them for quite some time, Jesus here calls them out in no uncertain terms.

You see, it's important to realize Jesus was not just spouting angry rhetoric against a group of people that he was ignorant of and hadn't bothered to interact with.

[14 : 53] There's plenty of that out in the world today, and it doesn't please the Lord. Neither was Jesus simply complaining about the Pharisees behind their back.

There's also plenty of complaining behind people's backs in our world today as well. It is cowardly and counterproductive to complain about someone behind their back and refuse to address your concerns to their face.

The Pharisees questioned in their hearts and grumbled behind Jesus' back. Jesus challenged the Pharisees to their face, straightforwardly, directly.

He didn't say what they wanted to hear. He said what they needed to hear, and in doing so, he honored their humanity and gave them an opportunity to change. You see, Jesus was speaking not as a cynical outsider, but as a committed insider.

He was calling out the tragic flaws of his very own people, calling them to change before it would be too late. And in this way, Jesus was like many of the Old Testament prophets.

[16 : 10] We read earlier from Isaiah. But the 8th century prophets, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, these prophets all warned the people of Israel that for generations God had been patient, and God had not brought the punishment upon them that they had deserved.

But these prophets warned that if they continued to persist in their wicked ways, that God would bring a terrible catastrophe, exile, and death upon the nation as a whole.

And Jesus gives a very similar warning in verses 47 to 51. Sadly, what we see at the end of the chapter is that the Pharisees and scribes do not take Jesus' warning and rebuke to heart.

They only become more hostile, more intent on hunting him down. So that's Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees and the scribes.

But the second point I want us to consider is Jesus' warning to beware of hypocrisy. You know, it's tempting to think that hypocrisy is only somewhere out there.

[17 : 24] Some other people, some other kind of church, some other religion, some group with a different political affiliation.

If you're a secular person, you might be tempted to think that hypocrisy is only a religious thing. I think hypocrisy is a human problem. It affects us all.

In chapter 12, verse 1, Jesus said to his disciples, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. You see, Jesus did not only confront the Pharisees, he also warned his own disciples that they too were vulnerable to the danger of falling into hypocrisy.

He said it's like leaven, like yeast, that can creep into a batch of dough. And at first, it's so small that you can hardly notice it when it's mixed in with the flour.

And only gradually over time does it become more and more pervasive, puffing up the whole loaf of bread. It adds, it doesn't add any substance.

[18 : 36] It only changes the appearance. Jesus says hypocrisy is like that. It can creep in unnoticed at first, under the radar, under the surface, and only over time it corrupts everything.

Today we might say hypocrisy is like a virus. So small that you can't even see it, but capable of making an entire body sick.

And then spreading it to an entire family. Right? Most of us have had sickness running through our families in the last month or two. We can go with that's like. So here's the question we need to ask.

In what specific ways have we allowed or are we prone to allow the virus of hypocrisy to attach itself to our system? Individually and as a church.

Let me point out some ways that it can begin to take root inside us, to puff us up, to infect us without us even realizing it.

[19 : 45] One, when we value appearances more than reality. Verse 39 and 40. Some of you have told me about churches that you have, where you have walked in and people have judged you by the clothes that you are wearing.

And you immediately felt like you didn't belong. I don't think that's our main problem here at Trinity. But I will tell you this.

Over the years, many people have come to me and said something like this. I look around the church and everyone else in the church seems so perfect and I'm a mess.

If I had a dollar for every time somebody had said that to me, I could take my wife out to a really nice dinner. So if you feel that way, you're not alone.

Are we afraid to be honest about our brokenness, our disordered desires, our besetting sins because we're so concerned with trying to hold together a good appearance because we're afraid of the shame?

[21 : 05] Two. When we make God's law into a checklist. Verse 42. According to Jesus, the basics of godly living are justice.

Now, that's not just the narrow sense of justice as punishing, wrongdoing, but the broad sense of justice that we see throughout the Bible of seeking to make things in this world right and whole and good and in line with God's design.

Justice and the love of God. Or as Jesus says in another place, loving your neighbor as yourself and loving God above all else. These are the most important commands of God and they are all encompassing principles that apply to every aspect of life.

There is no aspect of life that those principles are not relevant to. And there are also commands that are intended to humble us when we take them seriously.

If you earnestly examine every thought that you dwell on, every word that you say, every action that you carry out from the time you wake up in the morning until the time you fall asleep at night and ask yourself these questions, is the love of God the driving force behind all that I think, say, and do?

[22 : 35] And do my interactions and relationships and attitudes toward other human beings reflect a sincere desire for and an earnest pursuit of justice, truth, wholeness, and peace.

You know, if you take these standards seriously and if you look at your life honestly, I guarantee that you will be humbled because you will begin to see how far short you fall every single day.

For me, this truth hit home when I got married. Before I got married, I thought I was mostly unselfish and servant-hearted.

And then I promised to love and cherish just one person in the world without any qualifications until death do us part and my illusions about myself began to be severely challenged.

It's part of what marriage is meant to do. It's meant to humble us to be a mirror that reveals the darkest depths of our own soul even as it's also meant to be a window into the steadfast love and kindness of God.

[23 : 58] You see, the problem with the Pharisees is that instead of focusing on the big picture of God's law and being humbled by it, they fixated on minor details that weren't even commanded in God's law like tithing their herbs and washing their hands.

And they took pride in precisely fulfilling them. They made the law of God into a checklist and prided themselves on being able to tick off all the boxes.

Are we prone to that in one way or another? Three. When we think we're generous but actually we're not.

Verse 39 and 42. In a 2016 survey, 70% of millennials said they were very or somewhat generous. In the same survey, 84% of millennials reported giving away \$50 or less in the past year.

On average, Americans today give away 3% of their income. The percentage was higher during the Great Depression. And even today, the percentage people give generally decreases as income increases.

[25 : 31] We are very prone to self-deception in this area. So much that we hardly notice it. The Pharisees tithed.

That is, they gave 10% as the Old Testament required. Some of it was used to support the priests in the temple who taught the people.

Some of it was used to care for the poor in the land, the orphans, and the widows, and the foreigners. The Pharisees even made sure to tithe from their herbs.

Sort of like if you calculate how much your employer contributes toward your life insurance premiums and make sure to tithe on that too. But Jesus said in verse 39 that even though they tithed scrupulously, they were full of greed and wickedness.

For some of you, tithing 10% of your paycheck is a great sacrifice. It's a weekly or monthly act of trusting God by resolving to give Him your first and best and finding a way to get by on the rest without irresponsibly going into debt.

[26 : 52] But for some people, you can give away 10% of your income pre-tax without really being generous, let alone sacrificial. God has entrusted you with more, yes, so that you can enjoy some of it and give thanks to Him for it and not always feel guilty about that.

There is a wrong kind of guilt there. But also so that you can joyfully share it and invest it in something other than yourself.

invest it in the kingdom of God. Four, when we love praise and shut down criticism.

Verse 43 and verses 53 and 54. One of the biggest challenges I have found in being a pastor is guarding my heart through both praise and criticism.

I think we can fall into at least three dangers when people criticize us. One, being crushed by criticism and falling into despair.

[28 : 04] Two, being fearful and anxious of it and falling into cowardice. And three, what the Pharisees do here is becoming hardened against it and falling into pride.

criticism, whether it's well-intentioned or not and whether it's on target or not, can expose some of the idols in our hearts pretty quickly.

And so can praise in a different way. I've been reading a book by Eugene Peterson recently and he wrote this in a letter to a fellow pastor.

Classically, he wrote, there are three ways in which humans try to find transcendence apart from God as revealed in the cross of Jesus. Through the ecstasy of alcohol and drugs, through the ecstasy of recreational sex, through the ecstasy of crowds.

Church leaders frequently warn against the drugs and the sex, but at least in America almost never against the crowds. Probably because they get so much ego benefit from the crowds.

[29 : 21] Jesus is surrounded by crowds here. So many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another. And Jesus taught the crowds.

He didn't reject them. He didn't despise them. But he didn't chase them either. He didn't live for the praise of human beings, but for the praise of God.

There are other manifestations of hypocrisy we could point out from this list. When we become quick to criticize others and slow to help them, verse 46. When we admire courageous prophets of old, but reject those who courageously challenge us with biblical truths in the present day, verses 47 to 51.

Or finally, when we lack self-awareness and harm others as a result, verse 52. I don't think the Pharisees and scribes set out to be hypocrites.

We have no evidence that they thought of themselves in that way or that they were malicious. That they conspired together and were maliciously intent on misleading the people.

[30 : 36] No, they diligently studied the Scriptures. They carefully debated matters of theology. They zealously instructed others in the law, but their hypocrisy distorted their self-perception. And in verse 44, Jesus calls the Pharisees like unmarked graves.

That is, people would walk over them without realizing it and become unclean as a result. Jesus was saying, you're like a doctor who's spreading the plague to all of his patients without even realizing it.

You see, our fallenness in general and hypocrisy in particular makes us unable to perceive ourselves rightly. It makes us blind to our own flaws and offenses and oblivious to the ways that we hurt and offend others.

That's why hypocrisy is so dangerous. It's not just somewhere out there. It's right here. It's within us and among us.

And Jesus says, we must beware of it. That's his second point. But third and finally, in chapter 12, Jesus points us to a remedy to counteract hypocrisy.

[31 : 56] Chapter 12, verses 2 to 12, Jesus teaches us to do two things in order to counteract the infectious nature of hypocrisy. First, Jesus teaches us to fear the God from whom no secrets are hid.

Verses 2 to 5 and verses 9 to 10. Jesus says, one day, everything that is currently hidden will be made known. Everything whispered in secret will be shouted from the rooftops.

Hebrews 4, 13 says, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

Sooner or later, all the facades will come crashing down. All the masks will fall off. All the pretenses will be taken away. We will all stand before God.

There will be no running, no hiding, no minimizing or blaming, no clever rationales and no flimsy excuses. You can fool other people, you can even fool yourself, but you can't fool God.

[33 : 19] Jesus says in verse 5, fear God who has authority to cast into hell. You see, hypocrisy is not just an annoyance.

It's not just a human foible that we can sort of mock and laugh at. It is not only something that is at times deeply damaging to other human beings. More than anything else, hypocrisy is at its root and offense against the God of truth and light who made us.

some of you are parents. Think about how you would feel if you came to the realization that for years your child was living a double life, engaging in some dishonorable and destructive behavior all the while pretending and appearing to be loyal and obedient.

be furious and at the same time you'd be heartbroken. Furious that they would disrespect you and think they could pull the wool over your eyes and at the same time heartbroken that they wouldn't trust you and open up to you and ask you for help.

That's only a tiny picture of how God feels when he sees his creatures and his very own children who bear the name of Jesus living in hypocrisy.

[34 : 59] Jesus teaches us to fear the God from whom no secrets are hid. But second, in this very same section, Jesus teaches us to trust the God whose grace is always sufficient.

Verses 6 to 8 and 11 and 12. Right after Jesus admonishes his disciples to fear God, the righteous judge in verse 5, he immediately goes on to remind them in verse 6 that this very same God is also a merciful Father that you can trust.

And he has promised to look after us, never to forget us, never to forsake us. He values us highly, so highly that he was willing to send his one and only son to rescue us and bring us home.

And look at the promise in verse 8, for all who publicly confess, who acknowledge Jesus on earth, the son has promised that he will publicly acknowledge you in the court of heaven.

And finally, verse 11 and 12, Jesus promises his disciples that when they're persecuted and put on trial, when they face opposition and intimidation, beyond what they can bear, the Holy Spirit will teach you in that hour what you ought to say.

