

The Danger of Hypocrisy

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Preacher: David Court

[0:00] Our scripture reading on which the sermon will be based tonight is from Luke chapter 11.! Luke chapter 11, verses 37 through chapter 12, verse 3.

! And the author of Luke writes these words,! While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and he reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he 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. You fools! Did not he who made 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. 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 on 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.

This is God's holy Word. As Corey said at the beginning, we're returning to Luke's gospel and our series on the call to discipleship. I think this is our ninth sermon in this series.

[3:03] It was John Milton in his famous work, *Paradise Lost*, who described hypocrisy as the only evil that walks invisible except to God alone. And I think it's the concept of hypocrisy that dominates the verses that lie before us tonight. You may have noticed in the opening verse of chapter 12 how Jesus warns his own disciples, beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But what is this hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks? What is he referencing? And how is it a danger on the way of Christian discipleship?

I'm sure, as many of you are aware, heard many times before, that in the ancient Greco-Roman world, the hypocrite was an actor, one who performed on stage, wore a mask. But play-acting is not always confined to the theater stage. And so, the word hypocrite came to be used to refer to someone guilty of playing a part, being inauthentic in their relationships and way of life. It referred to a lack of integrity in both head and heart. So, hypocrisy, not just being guilty of saying one and doing another. We often think of it that way. It conveys more a sense of misrepresentation, a hiding

of one's true self behind a mask, not just moral inconsistency. It's about a deep-seated and deliberate pretense. It's to be guilty of misrepresenting who you really are, a form of deception and lies. And these verses tonight constitute a devastating critique of hypocrisy amongst the religious leaders of Jesus' day. And here, Jesus, in a strikingly direct manner, does not hold back from confronting these dangers. This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild. And that in itself should give us a pause for thought. For the religious hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks here is not a trifling matter. Hypocrisy may be a hidden, a quiet problem, but it's not an inconsequential one. The way of Christian discipleship is the path to becoming more like Jesus Christ, more authentic as a human being, more real, more integrated. But as Jesus reveals to us here, hypocrisy is a grave danger on the way of true discipleship, and we must be on our guard against it. So, what I want to do is just look at our text as we work our way through it under three headings. The first we find covering those verses of chapter 11 from verse 37 to 41. And we have here the critique that Jesus offers. While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. He went in and reclined at table. The Pharisee was astonished, surprised to see that he did not first wash before dinner. So, we find Jesus here who often ate with tax collectors and sinners, dining at the home of a certain Pharisee. And the Pharisees were a kind of religious group, very committed to living in a holy and righteous manner before God. But Jesus' behavior at the meal sparks a conflict with his host and his religious piety.

For Jesus, instead of engaging in the practice of ritual washing before eating, it goes straight to recline at the table. And his host is quite taken aback by Jesus' behavior. He's astonished. He appears shocked at Jesus' table manners or lack thereof. The Pharisees and the religious culture that they had developed around them required ritual washing before eating at table. This was what was expected of a faithful Jew. And these acts of ceremonial washing required by the Pharisees were a way of publicly displaying one's religious commitment, a badge of religious piety, a way of showing to others, to the community, how serious you were about the things of God. The Pharisees were absolutely scrupulous in such matters. However, here in this man's home, Jesus completely ignores this tradition.

[8:24] And part of the reason for that was, of course, that these washing rituals were not found in the law. They were an addition and an unwelcome one at that. And though reclining at his table was the one man on earth with clean hands and a pure heart, his host is astounded at Jesus' lack of religious etiquette.

And his response doesn't go unnoticed. You'll see there, verse 31, the Lord said to him, now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did he who made the outside not make the inside also? But give his arms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you. Jesus goes straight for the jugular.

He doesn't hold back in showing this man the error of his way of thinking. So concerned were the Pharisees with these external outward appearances that they failed to consider that true religion is always a matter of the heart. It involves both the internal and the external. And so obsessed had they become with how things looked and appeared to other people that they had neglected how things looked before God. Yes, on the outside, they looked very clean, very religious, very spiritual. But on the inside, their hearts were full of greed and wickedness. They were good at cleaning the outside of the dish, but they had ignored the inside, which was caked with all sorts of muck and filth. Their whole religious outlook was actually fatally flawed. It was folly, foolishness. For despite all their ceremonial ablutions, their hearts were left unchanged, unwashed, unclean. The dirty stain of their greed and wickedness remained untouched for all their washing. They were serving and pleasing themselves themselves and not God. The Pharisees had distorted God's revelation of Himself in Scripture.

[11:02] Sinclair Ferguson writes this, the character of our piety stems from how we view God. Small views of God and His grace produce small hearts and spiritual confinement. And that was the Pharisees. Another theologian, Mike Reeves, comments this, the Pharisees were as they were and acted as they did because they denied the gospel. Their mercilessness, love of applause, and trust in themselves all flowed from a refusal to listen to Scripture. A refusal to receive a righteousness

not their own, and a refusal to see their need for a new heart.

Their character was a manifestation of their theology. You see, a good moral scrub-up and a lick of religious paint is never enough. Superficial and cosmetic remedies abound in this world, and they are all doomed to fail.

Religion is not enough. Washing the outside of the cup is not enough. The appearance of morality is not enough, because it's a new heart that is required. We need more than a moral bath. We need grace.

We need the gospel. We need Jesus Christ Himself. And beware of settling for anything less than Him. Focus on externals alone is a real danger.

I used to think that everyone who carried a Bible, who called themselves an evangelical, must be a good Christian, must be a good Christian. Well, almost 40 years in the ministry have opened my eyes. Hypocrisy. The kind that likes to have all the right language, all the right phrases, has all the right books on the bookshelf, even stickers, badges proclaiming, Jesus as Lord. Gives every outward indication of devoutness and moral integrity, but whose heart you come to discover remains absolutely unchanged. Nothing but a cesspool of filth.

[13:41] And the real test of our faith, says Jesus, is what is going on in the inside, where no one else can see.

Is the house really clean? Or like the Pharisees of old, have we just swept the dirt under the carpet, painted a shiny veneer over the rotten timbers of our true selves? What is going on inside?

In our hearts is a critical issue. The critique Jesus offers. And then secondly here, from verse 42 to 54, really the main section here, we have the woes Jesus pronounces. The critique He offers, and then the woes He pronounces. And again, Jesus, you'll notice, really holds nothing back. As He sets His sights on these religious leaders, He pronounces a series of six woes on their malformed spirituality. He begins in verses 42 to 44 by speaking to the Pharisees before moving on to include the lawyers. He's not referring to solicitors or anything like that.

Those who are experts in interpreting and teaching the law. And the woes Jesus declares are a kind of announcement of judgment. The word conveys a sense of sadness or grief. It's the word mourners would cry over a coffin. And in the Old Testament, serve to call as a call to repentance and for people to change their ways. And I think that's how we're to understand Jesus' words here. He's not just damning those religious leaders. He's imploring them to recognize their foolishness and to repent before they feel the blast of God's judgment. Let's look at these woes one by one. We'll be relatively brief.

Woe to you Pharisees, verse 42. You tithe mint and rue every herb and neglect justice and the love of God. Those you ought to have done without neglecting the others. So, Jesus begins this expose by speaking about tithing, setting aside of a tenth of one's income for the Lord and for His work, something commanded in the law of Moses, Deuteronomy 14. But by Jesus' day, the Pharisees had, I suppose, expanded this principle of tithing to cover all sorts of things, even the herbs that they grew in the garden. And tithing is a good practice, one that Jesus commends to us. But He points out here that it is not to be scrupulously followed at the expense of other more weighty items. The Pharisees' detailed, strict obedience had, in fact, become a cover for ignoring far weightier aspects of God's law. They made much of these little rules that they were easily within their reach, and all the while distracting attention from the big rules, if you like, that they couldn't or wouldn't keep. And that focus on legalistic details is often a way that people seek to avoid feelings of guilt or to avoid or evade repentance. The human heart likes to focus on laws, things that it can obey with ease and solve, as it were, a troubled conscience. I may not love my neighbor, but at least I read my Bible every day. I may lack integrity in my business practices, but I always say grace at mealtimes. I may be a liar and a gossip, but hey, I never miss the Lord's

[18:04] Supper. The human heart will sometimes go to inordinate lengths to avoid facing up to its own sin and rebellion against God. And don't you realize, says Jesus, God doesn't want you to miss the wood for the trees. No matter how neatly marked your Bible, how precisely scheduled your quiet time is, do not forget that justice and love are the weighty matters you must not ignore. Woe to you Pharisees. You love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Verse 43, we know that the Pharisees took delight in public applause. They laid great sort of emphasis on their position in the community, their status. They

had to have the best seats. They had to be seen elsewhere in the Gospels. Jesus indicates that their prayers were attention-seeking. They greeted one another ostentatiously with great flourishes.

Their charitable giving was made with, you know, with trumpets blowing. When they fasted, they made sure that everyone knew what they were doing. Their whole religion was performed according to Jesus for the praise of the praise of men rather than God. Living for the praise of other people is a subtle trap that ensnares many. The crowd gives us the reason to pull on the mask, and how easily we can find ourselves driven, really, by what others think and say, rather than by what God thinks and God says.

Woe to you, you're like unmarked graves, verse 44. People walk over them without knowing it. Have contact with a corpse was ritually defiling for a Jew, so cemeteries were very clearly marked. Tombs would be whitewashed to make them stand out. Unmarked graves represented a religious hazard. And Jesus says, this is what you Pharisees have become. You look innocent enough, but you're leading people astray. You're defiling others. You're leading them not to God, you're leading them away from God.

What about, if you're a Christian today, what about your own spiritual influence? Are we leading people to God or away from Him? Is our influence a healthy one? Or is it just an exercise in exhibitionism?

[20:53] The great saints of the past, I think, understood this well. Maureen McShane, it was, who once said, what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and no more. And that place of prayer is a key to personal integrity, because we must build our lives not on the approval of others, but on our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Now, you would have thought that such a damning triad of woes would be enough, but Jesus is spurred on to deliver three more. And this time, it's the lawyers who come into his gun sights, as it were. One of the lawyers answered him, teacher, in saying these things, you insult us as well. Indeed, I do, says Jesus. You lawyers are just as bad as the Pharisees.

In fact, you're worse. These men made their living by attention to the text of the Old Testament and interpreting the moral requirements there. And so he says to them, woe to you lawyers also, verse 46, you load people with burdens that are hard to bear. You yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. The lawyers had a teaching ministry, but their often man-made rules weighed people down with burdens that they couldn't hope to carry. There were huge lists of do's and don'ts, not found in Scripture. According to the Psalmist, the study of the Bible should be a delight. God's law and particular, he said, was sweeter than honeycomb to the taste. But the lawyers had desiccated biblical religion into a tedious catalog of thou shalt and thou shalt nots. Where the Bible offered mercy, they offered rules. Where the Bible offered forgiveness, they offered more rules. Where the Bible offered grace, they offered still more man-made rules. Their narrow-hearted teachings obscured God's grace and His love for sinners. And I reflect that that is a danger for ministers and teachers of God's Word still. It's all too easy for us to distort God's character, maybe not just in what we say, but in the manner of our preaching. I know that is a danger for myself. Sinclair Ferguson, in his book, *The Whole Christ*, a discussion of kind of the marrow controversy, was a sidebar that I'm not going to go down tonight. But he talks there of a narrow heart polluting the atmosphere of biblical preaching.

And he writes this, when people are broken by sin, full of shame, feeling weak, conscious of failure, ashamed of themselves and in need of counsel, they do not want to listen to preaching that fails to connect them with the marrow of gospel grace and the Father of infinite love for sinners.

It's a gracious and loving Father they need to know. 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. Verses 47 and 48. The religious, Jewish religious establishment down through the years had opposed and persecuted God's messengers, rejected the prophets, and instead built tombs for them. Their fathers had claimed to know the truth, but had failed to recognize true prophets. And now these lawyers couldn't recognize the greatest messenger and prophet of them all.

[25:05] They couldn't recognize Jesus Himself. They opposed Him at every twist and turn. They sought to have Him killed. Yes, Galilean peasants could recognize Him, and Roman centurions could see it, and blind beggars and demon-possessed individuals could see it. But the lawyers and Pharisees would not see it.

And instead, they conspired to nail Him to a cross. Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I'll send them prophets, 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. Abel and Zechariah really stand symbolically from the A to Z of biblical martyrs. From the beginning of the Old Testament to its end, people who spoke for God by their righteousness and by the divine authority of their words paid for it with their lives. And Jesus here predicts ominously this generation will prove no different.

They will commit the final and most appalling act of sacrilege, crucifying the very Son of God Himself. Woe to you lawyers, you've taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves. You hindered those who were entering, verse 52. Jesus says that these experts in the law have locked the door of the kingdom and thrown away the key. Instead of people encountering the saving knowledge of the gospel of the kingdom, they have found instead only a kind of dead-end religion, one that's abandoned grace, abandoned the good news. It's rejected and obscured the message of God's redeeming love, a spiritual dead end of religious formalism. And so, it's little wonder that Jesus draws His disciples away from the surging crowds in the verses that follow and warns them of the threat that popularity and admiration from others can pose to the way of true discipleship. The critique Jesus offers, the woes He pronounces, thirdly, finally here, as time disappears, the danger He highlights in verses 1 to 3 of chapter 12. When so many thousands of the people had gathered together, trampling one another, He said to His disciples first, Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. Whatever you've said in the dark shall be heard in the light. What you've whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Jesus warns here of the leaven of the Pharisees. The leaven, a piece of fermented dough, causes the bread to rise when baked. That's an image often used in the Scriptures to describe the influence of sin.

[28:37] It may appear something small and insignificant, but it has a dramatic influence on everything around it. And here Jesus uses this metaphor to highlight the danger of hypocrisy. It may start as something small. It may start as something insignificant, but it can soon grow to taint and color everything in a person's life. I suppose over past years I've experienced the deep sadness of discovering individuals, some of whom I was close to, or at least I thought I was, as being unmasked, as living a lie.

I don't know all that went on in their hearts and their lives, but what started as something apparently small became so baked into their lives that it utterly consumed them?

It went to sometimes inordinate lengths to keep up the facade, to keep up appearances. And friends, hypocrisy like any sin must be dealt with in a ruthless matter, because the spiritual corruption it brings will not lie hidden forever. J.C. Ryle says this, whatever we are in religion, let us never wear a cloak or a mask. There is nothing concealed, says Jesus, that will not be disclosed, hidden, that will not be made known. What you've said in the dark will be heard in the daylight. What you've whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the rooftops. What a terrifying thought. The day is coming, he says, when everything's going to be brought out into the light, when the truth will be exposed and revealed.

For all the world may indeed be a stage, but one day the curtain will fall on our performance. Our masks will be removed. Our true selves revealed. People will see who and what we really are. We'll stand naked before a holy God. So, don't be fooled by God's patience. Sin and hypocrisy will one day be judged. We will stand before God's judgment seat, says Paul, and all of us will give an account of himself to God. Some of you may have heard of the Fastnacht celebrations. I think they're held central Germany, I think perhaps in Switzerland. It takes place at the beginning of Lent

on Shrove Tuesday, a kind of carnival. Everyone dresses up, wears costumes and masks. And in some places, it became an occasion for sensuality, debauchery, people hiding behind their masks, their disguises, were able, you know, to throw caution to the wind. Unrecognized, unseen, they could behave as they so pleased and not be discovered and found out. And the story goes that in one town where I think the

[31:58] Salvation Army was evangelical, they placed signs and posters all over the town. These posters contained just a few words. In German, apologies to Axel, Gott sieht hinter dein mask. God sees behind the mask.

One of the features of our individualistic world is that for many people, almost everything has been reduced to a kind of an act. The scenes change, the actors change, the parts change, but we never leave the stage. There's a mask for church and a mask for work, a mask for home, a mask for every situation.

Spend much of our lives reflecting back to others the images we think they want to see. But our identity is not ultimately defined by ourselves or even by others. There is only one relationship which can rightly claim to define our true identity. There is only one place where the masks come off, where there is nothing concealed that isn't disclosed. And that is in a personal relationship with the living God. And that is what Jesus offers to us in the gospel. That's the key to the kind of spiritual integrity that Jesus is looking for. And deep down, we all long for. It's in this personal relationship with God. And we are designed for that relationship. We are made for it.

In its absence, our self-consciousness floats around in a raging sea of lost identity, because authenticity and reality are to be found only in Jesus Christ and in being clothed in His righteousness. Only in Him can we discard our sinful inauthenticity. Only in Him can we become true human beings.

Why are we to respond to Jesus' words here? Well, give up trying to prove ourselves something that we're not by being honest before God, honest about ourselves, honest about our sin. The Christian life, the disciples' life, is a life of constant confession and repentance. We must come to Christ. We must receive His righteousness because only His righteousness will enable any of us to stand on the day of God's judgment. And that righteousness comes to us by way of the cross, where the sinless one tasted judgment for us. It comes to us as that old foundation of self-trust, self-confidence, self-righteousness is broken up, and our lives find a new foundation. Not sand, but rock. Not lies, but truth. Not self, but Christ.

[35:19] And that righteousness comes to us as a free gift of God's grace. It's how we discover who we really are, because it's in Jesus that we discover a self to be true to.

The Pharisees were massively insecure. Think of Luke 2nd volume, the book of Acts, and we read there of a Pharisee, don't we?

Who, confronted by Jesus Christ, became a new person. Remember what Paul wrote of that transformation, Philippians 3? I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God comes from God and is by faith. You see, what Paul lacked in himself, he found in Jesus Christ. And friends, the good news here is that Jesus ate with Pharisees too. He came not just for the wayward prodigals, he came for elder brothers as well.

Do you harbor hopes that your life, your goodness, your morality, your religion is in any way commending yourself to God? Do you think your morality will in any way affect God's heart? Do you think God's favor is related to your religious performance? Well, if you do, you have not understood the Bible.

You have not understood the gospel of God's amazing grace. You know, some of us have convinced ourselves that we're good and we're righteous and we're loving, but we've never known the real God, pleasure of life in His presence, never really enjoyed a relationship with Him.

[37:37] Self-righteousness has kept us from the party. We've never joined in because we've never seen ourselves as desperate moral failures in need of forgiveness and restoration. We think we're better than that. Friends, you're not. Do not be content to be religious. Like the elder brother in Jesus' famous story, some of us prefer to stand on the doorstep in our pride, look in from the outside to exclude ourselves.

And exclude ourselves we will. If we stay out of heaven, it will be because we have refused to step in. It's because we've refused to take that step of faith, too proud to accept His grace.

Friends, tonight, leave your religion and your pride and your good works on the doorstep. And step inside to a house where grace's sweet aroma pervades everything, and the host has laid down His very lifeblood for you.

Step inside that house and discover your view of God utterly transformed, enlarged, expanded. For here is the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.

Let's pray together. Amen. Lord, you see us as we are, not as we like to think we are.

[39:37] You see us in all our sin, in all our failure.

You see what others cannot see. And yet in Jesus Christ, you love us. And you invite us to come to you in faith, to lean on you alone.

Amen. Not to trust ourselves. Not to be curved in on ourselves. Not to be obsessed with ourselves. But to lose ourselves in you, the living and eternal God. May that be true for us tonight, all of us in this room.

May your Spirit come. may he renew us may he refresh us may he convict us may he bless us and may he lead us to Jesus for we ask it in his name amen