

## The Heart Behind Hypocrisy

*Luke 11:37-54*

**Introduction:** There are two lies that are told at different poles of the reality spectrum, particularly in our culture. The first is that we have to settle on a normal, mediocre, blasé existence. We believe that the path of least resistance is preferable and that we need to stop once we reach a threshold of pain. Never dream big, never set big goals, and never seek to attain something that has never been before is the mantra of those who believe our capacity is minimal and our resolve is weak. This is why we push ourselves in areas of life athletics, competition, performing arts, and ventures beyond our normal experiences. This is how things like the CPC are started, how businesses begin, and how missionaries leave family and home for the sake of the gospel.

But there is another pole of reality that we can get drawn into, and that has to do with the ideal that someone can do *anything*. We are all limited by our humanity, which means we are NOT god, so there are inherent factors that make certain things impossible. I am limited by biology (I will never give birth), genetics (I will never play basketball in the NBA), and talent (I love to sing, but I will never make a living at it - unless people pay to have me stop) and strength (there is a limit to the number of people I can scrap with in the ally). There are areas of **impossibility** for us, and that is not a bad thing because it reminds us that *we are not god, nor were we created to be*.

One area of impossibility we often forget is this: ***without faith it is impossible to please God*** (Heb. 11:6), and ***without Christ we cannot be righteous*** (Rom. 3:21-26). When we try to please God apart from faith, apart from Christ, and apart from a motivation of a love for God, we engage in something called *moralism*, which places the ability to be righteous on our own shoulders to be carried out by our own two hands. This is such a subtle and appealing belief that ***we all*** believe at some point and battle at every turn. We leave salvation up to ourselves, sanctification up to ourselves, and ultimately access into God's kingdom up to us (I got this, God!) Unfortunately, this mindset breaks down in many ways, from validating ourselves by our external achievements, to a prideful existence to be seen by others, to a cold heart toward God and others, to a massive lack of grace toward others, to a lack of true joy in Christ since our life has not been hidden with Him.

So here is what we are after this morning, in order to identify the areas we function outside of faith in Christ:

**The Overarching Principle:** *Focusing on outward moralism without inward change is foolish (11:39-41).* There is no pleasing God, no redeemable work, no amount of obedience that matters **AT ALL** if we have not been born again and operate in the grace God provides.

Before we enter into the passage, we have to talk through the characters of the exchange. Jesus was invited to the house of a **Pharisee** on the tail end of some hard conversations with them. He was going to offer **6 woes**, which were both scathing and a call to turn. *But who were the Pharisee's?* If you have been around a church at all or read the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), you have a pretty bad taste in your mouth concerning these folks. In fact, to be called a Pharisee in the church is NOT a complement, and is typically attached to *legalism, hypocrisy, and lacking love*. If I asked for a raise of hands, most would say they have encountered Pharisee type people in their life, but they themselves are not one. What I want to show you is this: *we may be more like the Pharisee's than we'd like to think, so this passage is very much for us* (not for the person sitting with us or for the church down the street).

### Who were the Pharisee's?

- **Source** - Sect of Judaism that formed during the inter-testamental period during Israel's deportation and sojourn in Babylon. During the time of Jesus there were four main sects of Judaism (Sadducee's - Temple and Hellenist; Essenes - separatist from culture; Zealot - rebels looking to overthrow Rome by force). Each tried to live out their belief in the midst of a Gentile power in control. **Pharisees** sought to keep the Law fully and be righteous, seeing the exile as a punishment from God for failure to keep it
- **Strategy** - Pharisee means "to separate", but they did so through the Law. they separated from nominal Judaism and Hellenistic influences. They did this through strict adherence to all facets of the law. Their motivation was they longed for a righteous Israel and hoped for the coming Messianic Kingdom.
- **Place of Influence** - When you think Pharisee, think "Synagogue" . Synagogue was more than a local church, it was a place of social standing, business partnership, and family interaction. The Pharisee's would teach here, but more importantly, they could put someone out of the Synagogue (see John 9:22), which meant they had much influence over the common Jewish person
- **Reception by the common man** - They were **revered** by most. These were middle class men who voluntarily gave themselves to the high calling of keeping the law. When Jesus told people that unless their righteousness exceeded that of the Pharisee's (Matt. 5:20), it would have silenced the people with a shudder because they were the epitome of external awesomeness. It was a rather exclusive group, with some accounts giving numbers of around 6000 at the time of Jesus.
- **Distinguishing Feature** - What they focused on was NOT SCRIPTURE ALONE, but also the ORAL LAW, which was passed down from generation to generation. This was accepted as **just as authoritative and inspired as the Torah**, including all the explanatory and supplementary material. The Oral Law was taking all that the Rabbi's said about the Law (like taking all the sermons, commentaries, and Bible notes from Bible teachers and putting them on equal plane as Scripture). The oral commentary sought to explain how to live out the law - like "how do I keep the Sabbath holy?" NOTE: This is not unlike what we try to do today. We each try to do this. How do we love God with our mind? Our heart? Our strength? We seek to apply Scripture to all of life, just like they did.
- **Downfall** - They were admirable in their attempt, but there were a few areas where they fell short, that are pertinent to this passage: 1) Placing *anything* on the same level of Scripture is dangerous. Sermons and commentaries are great, but they are NEVER to compete with the authority of Scripture. 2) They systematized the application of Scripture (which we all strive to do), but then required others to keep it the same way. Unity in diversity requires us to leave room for each other to practice the truth differently, and not judge others by our application. 3) They drifted to a focus on externals which bred pride, self-righteousness, practice of power, and moving away from loving God to loving themselves.

"Despite excesses and failures to the extent that it remained Biblical, it accomplished much. Pharisaism was at heart, though tragically miscarried, a movement for righteousness. This is what drove their legalism with such fervor and passion."<sup>1</sup>

Instead of a caricatured view of Pharisee's, we find a group with **good intentions and hard work** fighting for something massive that seemed impossible. We can resonate and even admire their zeal, but we **MUST** learn from their tragic example and not repeat it.

<sup>1</sup> D. A Hagner, "Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible", p. 752.

**The Heart Behind the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees** (11:42-44)

*"Now the Pharisee's cleanse out the outside of the cup and the dish, but the inside is full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within and behold, everything is clean to you."*

- **The Action** - Focusing on the secondary issues (tithing) and missed the weightier ones (justice and love)

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*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."*

Pharisees were consistent givers, giving the exact amount, even on the leaves of herbs. Meticulous in their assessment, they were the ones who made sure to give 10% on the gross, not just the net, of their paychecks, and even gave off of their tax refund, birthday money, and bonuses. This is the type of person that churches would seemingly love to have and of whom it seems like a high level of integrity is attached. But there was a large problem, and Jesus pointed it out.

1. **They gave, but they were not generous** - They neglected the real needs around them. Notice that Jesus did not tell them to STOP giving, but not to neglect weightier issues of justice. They were so focused on the minutiae that they missed the big picture of why we give our money.
2. **They gave, but they missed the point** - - In Mark 7, we see that the Pharisees would give their money to God but neglect taking care of their parents. Their giving was self-motivated, what they could be known for and seen, not taking care of people who they were responsible for.
3. **They gave, but they were not giving to trust, love, or make much of God** - God loves a cheerful, dependent, generous giver. When Jesus pointed out the widow who gave her last two mites (pennies - Luke 21:3-4), He pointed out she gave the most, more than the rich who liked being seen. When we give, we not only do it *because we love God*, but also declare we trust God to take care of us.

- **The Motive** - Self-exaltation

*"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces"*

The **reason** they missed the point was their motivation in keeping the law. They were motivated by seating placements and greetings. Matthew 23 tells us they did all their deeds to be seen by others, wearing broad phylacteries and long fringes in public. You could always see a Pharisee coming. They wanted to not only keep the law, but wanted others to KNOW that they kept the law. The value was no longer God's glory but their own.

- **The Result** - Cause others to be worse off

*"Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."*

Outside of Jerusalem there are graves that are strewn throughout the hillside, and pilgrims travelling into Jerusalem for feasts would unknowingly step on these, defiling themselves from participating in the festivities. During feast times, tombs would be whitewashed to signal to unsuspecting travelers. Here, the Pharisees were like these unmarked graves because those following their teaching and examples were unknowingly defiled, even though their motives were right.

**Principles of the Heart (to avoid hypocrisy):**

1. We must consistently check our heart and motives as we seek to obey God righteously. Are we doing these things to be accepted by God, or to feel more accomplished, or to be seen by others? Or are we living out the realities of God's grace and Christ's righteousness in our lives?
2. Is our practice as consistent in private as it is in public? The easiest way to live a hypocritical life is to only do right things in front of others. Am I worshipping God in private, at work, and at home?
3. Is practicing obedience leading me to love God more? Love others more? Am I reading God's Word to be amazed, or to say I did? Is my heart soft toward others who do not practice like me or who don't "get it"?
4. Am I basing my identity or success on external's or am I clinging to the knowledge that I am Christ's, and have His righteousness and life?

**The Heart Behind the Hedges of the Lawyers** (11:46-52)

*"One of the lawyers answered him, 'Teacher, in saying these things, you insult us also.'"*

Talk about gluttons for punishment, or stepping into a punch. The lawyers were not public litigators, but they were experts in both the written and oral law, and were responsible to delineate the minute details of what was or wasn't acceptable. It was this that Jesus took exception to.

- **The Action** - Encasing the law

*"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."*

In order to keep the law, the Pharisees and lawyers would draw up regulations around the law, encasing it with practices so that someone would not come close to violating the law itself. Think about this in terms of hedges. They put hedge rows around each law to protect it from violation. The problem was that these hedges became impossible to keep, and became burdensome to even try (remember, God's laws to be obeyed are not burdensome - 1 John 5:3). For example, to define work on the Sabbath, they determined that one could not lift something heavier than a dried fig, because something more would be carrying a burden. The problem was NOT so much that they tried to figure out how to keep the law, but the fact that they counted the hedges as important, and violation of these as greater offenses. Instead of helping the people prioritize the most important things, they continued to weigh them down with more and more. Instead of fostering a desire for God, it became an exhausting process with no rest, no joy, and no end.

- **The Consequence** - Worse than the false prophets of the Old Testament

*"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..."*

In an extremely vivid consequence, Jesus compared the lawyers to those in the OT who killed the prophets. The Lawyers felt justified and proud that they honored the tombs of the prophets (who called out idolatry), but Jesus said they were worse. They had the greatest prophet sent to them in Jesus, and

instead of yielding to Him, they continued on in their practice of self-idolization. Because this was the greatest offense, they were guilty of all the blood of the prophets from Abel (the first martyr killed unjustly for righteousness) to Zechariah (the prophet and author of the book of Zechariah whose death was not recorded but took place at the close of the OT - Matt. 23:35 records he was the son of Berechiah, which gives us verification of his identity). They were under condemnation because of their neglected privilege. We also know that the price would be paid by 70 AD, as Jerusalem was razed and many would be killed by the Romans.

- **The Result** - Take away true knowledge of God from people

*"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key to knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."*

One of the most treacherous things anyone can do is lead someone away from the truth (James 3:1). Here, Jesus indicts the lawyers from doing this. They so encased the law of God that they took away the purpose. The law was NEVER intended to be a means of righteousness alone, but one that would show us our sin and our need of salvation. The law would showed us we could not keep the law, pointing to the ONE who kept the whole law, fulfilling it, to be able to be both just and the justifier of our faith (Romans 3:26). The lawyers so focused on their own interpretations they missed the need for faith in the messiah.

I have seen this happen personally. I grew up in a church that focused on keeping God's Word and even separating from the world, but also one that did it to the sacrifice of knowing Christ, joyfully focusing on Him, and the release from the power of sin through repentance. I watched as my cousins rejected the faith, but it was not so much that they rejected Jesus, but rejected the unloving, unsustainable, legalistic practices that were taught but COULD NEVER be lived up to.

#### **Principles to avoid the Hedges of Hypocrisy:**

1. Have our traditions overtaken what Scripture actually says? Traditions are not bad nor wrong, but they can easily, slowly, and insidiously take the place of what Scripture says. This means we must always go back to examine Scripture.
2. Do we evaluate others negatively by how they exercise obedience? We are all seeking to love God with our whole heart, and we each will do this differently. We all have "hedges" in our families, parenting, marriages, entertainment, and spending. Do we leave room for people to do it differently than us, and even celebrate that fact?
3. In seeking to apply Scripture, are we enjoying God in Christ? Are we showing people the right path to righteousness? Are we communicating that "being good" is not what being a Christian is, but instead having a righteousness given to us by Christ alone? Are we willing to admit our weakness to live up to all the standards of Scripture, but by God's grace we strive to obey to God's glory?

**The Takeaway Principle:** *True righteousness comes from faith alone in knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil. 3:2-11)*

*"Convinced they had attained the righteousness they sought, the Pharisee's became prey to their own self-satisfaction and unknowingly rejected their only hope of true righteousness."<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Hagner, p. 752.

Listen to what Paul learned. He was a Pharisee. He was a good one. He was the best of the best, blameless under the law, zealous, and faithful. But here is what he learned in Christ, and it was no less than new birth in Christ:

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that i may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**"*