

The Gospel Cure for Hypocrisy

(Luke 11:27–28; 33–36; 37–54)

Intro

Our mothers warned us: “Not everything that shines is gold...”

What is hypocrisy? In the Bible, the word describes actors who “put on a mask.” More precisely, religious hypocrisy is outward light and inward darkness.

As we analyze Jesus’ critique, we must apply it to ourselves. If we only critique *them*, this sermon will backfire — because we will become the hypocritical ones.

This sermon in a nutshell: Hypocrisy is not a Pharisee problem; it is a human problem. And its cure is not religious effort, but Christ’s light entering the heart.

(I) The Pharisees’ assessment of Christ’s spirituality (Outward)

We call this an “assessment,” but it is nothing more than an opinion. The creature cannot assess the Creator; only the Creator has authority, power, and capability to assess the creature.

What was their assessment of Christ? *“He doesn’t wash.”*

The text says he was “amazed” that Jesus didn’t wash — not good amazement, but bad. This was not hygiene washing, but ritual washing. Ritual washing was restricted to Temple worship, but conservative Jews, wanting to appear “holier than thou,” applied it to daily life. And the rule they applied to themselves, they applied to everyone else — measuring people with their own stick.

(II) Christ’s assessment of the Pharisees’ spirituality (Inward)

Christ doesn’t have an opinion about the Pharisees; he has a diagnosis. Being God, he sees the heart plainly. Being Lord, he alone is entitled to rule.

Jesus identifies two symptoms in their spirituality: **love of money** and **love of pride**.

Love of money - “They give with one hand and take with the other.”

“They religiously and meticulously give the tithe (10%), but they neglect justice and mercy.” We may hear “justice and mercy” as moral traits, but in this monetary context, Jesus is referring to charity toward the vulnerable. The same Bible that commands tithing also commands care for the poor. The Pharisees did the former but neglected the latter.

Their hearts were not in giving but in hoarding. They gave the tithe as an obligation — not even 1% more. The 10% was their maximum display of generosity, when God intended it to be the bare minimum.

“Do one without neglecting the other,” Jesus commands.

Application: Some argue tithing is not required today because it is Old Testament. But Jesus’ words — “Do this...” — affirm generosity as a baseline, not a ceiling. So while Christians may differ on the exact percentage, the spirit of tithing remains: **intentional, sacrificial, and consistent giving**. In light of Jesus’ teaching, I understand that we should still practice tithing today — and go above and beyond.

Love of pride – “Call me Dr. Pastor. Rev.”

They loved the best seats and the religious status they acquired. Their status wasn’t about money or academic degrees; it was religious prestige: “I am a doctor of the Bible,” “I am a pastor — call me Pastor So-and-So,” “Reserve my seat at the front; I want to arrive late and still sit in the best place.” If they were in America, they’d have a Starbucks coffee in hand as they worshiped with the congregation!

Jesus’ diagnosis: “You are like unmarked graves.”

In Jewish context, touching a grave made someone ceremonially unclean for a week. Graves were supposed to be marked. But unmarked graves made people unclean without them even realizing it.

When Jesus says, “You are like unmarked graves,” he means: “You appear clean, but everyone who comes near you becomes unclean.” Their doctrine, lifestyle, and legalism produced more death — uncleanness — than life and purity.

Application: Healthy check-up question: *Do we bring people closer to God and our church, or do we drive them away?*

(III) Christ's assessment of the Scribes' spirituality (A combo!)

Pharisees and scribes appear together in the Gospels, but they are distinct. Pharisees were the sect — “the separated ones.” Scribes were the professionals: interpreters, writers, and teachers of Scripture. They are rightly translated as “doctors of the Law.”

Not every scribe was a Pharisee, but most were. That's why the scribe objected: “Teacher, when you condemn the Pharisees, you offend us too.” Jesus essentially replies: “If the shoe fits Paul, it fits Peter too.” (My Brazilian translation!)

Jesus' critique is a combo: **legalism**, **self-righteousness**, and **‘thanks for your disservice.’** They are inseparable.

First, understand this: **when you add to Scripture, you take away from Scripture.**

Illustration: *Scripture is like a farmhouse with a strong fence and a wide door — boundaries that protect, and a door that welcomes.*

The Pharisees built an extra fence around the fence — with no doors. Over time, they confused the outer fence with Scripture itself: “If someone breaks our fence, they will break God's too.”

Their intention may sound “zealous,” but it implies Scripture is insufficient. Their outer fence becomes an extra lawyer that pushes people away from God instead of drawing them near.

- **Legalism:** “Here's the list of things you must do.”
- **Self-righteousness:** “I do them better than you.”
- **Thanks for your disservice:** “And I won't help you do any of them.”

Application: Do we open the gates of heaven for people, or shut them? Do people feel comfortable around us because we are Christians, or averted because we are ‘Christians’?

Conclusion — What do we do with our religious hypocrisy?

1. Should we apply antinomianism — the belief that we need no rules? That's like healing your right lung while killing your left.

2. Should we “try harder”? Probably not. As Tim Keller says, “The fastest way to become a Pharisee is to complain about one.”
3. Our solution is the Gospel: **“Let Christ examine you.”** Once he examines you, let his light in.

Luke places this critique of the Pharisees right after Jesus’ teaching on light and darkness: *If the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

The Pharisees kept the light outside — turning it into a weapon to hit everyone around them. Jesus teaches that the light must come inside. He is the light of the world: he forgives our hypocrisy and teaches us how to live an altruistic life.

When we spend our time looking at him and his grace, rather than worrying about how we or others look outwardly, we find healing.

Illustration: *I once ate with a very new Christian who lectured me on “proper worship”: proper clothes, proper songs, proper words, proper doctrine. Some might be “amazed” by his zeal; I was deeply concerned. Why? Because the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. This new believer spent his time telling me how he properly worships Christ — instead of telling me what Christ has done for him on the Cross.*

He was given the wrong metrics for his spiritual life. My family, who evangelized me, spent 0% of their time telling me how they properly did this or that — and 100% telling me what Christ properly accomplished on the Cross on my behalf.

The Gospel changes our lives because it changes our metrics: we shift them from us to him — and his metrics are far better than ours.