

Sunday, February 4, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 11 | Luke 11:37-54 | "The Masks We Wear"

Last week, we talked about *proper focus*. Too often in life, we miss, as it were, the forest for the trees. We miss something of *greater* importance while focusing on something of *lesser* importance. For the unbelievers in Jesus' day, they demanded *signs* while ignoring what the signs were pointing to. And while they stubbornly insisted on a showman, they missed their Savior. Likewise, we can be so hyper-fixated on getting something from Jesus that we can forget that he is the most significant thing in our lives. Thus, we must remember that **the message of Jesus is greater than the miracles of Jesus.** If we have the Son of God, then we need nothing else. If all we had was the gospel, that would be more than enough.

Today, we'll be talking about *hypocrisy*. In first century Greek, "hypocrite" meant "an interpreter from underneath."¹ This definition might seem unusual until you realize that the word first described *actors* and how they would wear disguises during their performances. They'd, quite literally, recite their lines while "underneath" the covering of a mask (**SHOW PICTURE**).

Like some ancient actor, many people wear masks. It feels like we're surrounded by pretenders. Is anyone real? Politicians are prime examples of hypocrites; many are better than those in Hollywood. However, only the egomaniac claims they've never played the part of a hypocrite. We are all guilty of feigning virtue to disguise some vice...at least once and likely many more.

The destructive effects of hypocrisy can be seen everywhere. It's bad for relationships, politics, the workplace, and so on; however, it is altogether cataclysmic when it comes to religion. How many have experienced the so-called "church hurt" at the hands of a hypocrite? How many have turned their back on God, not because of truth, but because those who were supposed to be beacons of truth were just play-acting? Of all the sins, Jesus reserved his harshest condemnation for hypocrisy. Thus, we would do well to take today's "woes" to heart. After all, the only thing more embarrassing than a lousy actor is a hypocritical Christian.

¹ General Editors, "The Origin of 'Hypocrite'," Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/hypocrite-meaning-origin>, [accessed February 3, 2024].

As you no doubt have noticed, the form of today's sermon is backward. Rather than **end** with the takeaway, it comes **first**. Jesus structures his own words this way, and we'll also see how the main point applies to specific points within the passage itself.

So, what's the takeaway?

The **hypocrite** cleans the **outside** but leaves the inside **unclean**.

READ: Luke 11:37-41 (ESV)

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the **outside** make the **inside** also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are **within**, and behold, everything is clean for you.

The "washing" referred to here is not hygienic but ceremonial. As is it incited by the use of the Greek term *baptizō*, the Pharisees were mentally condemning Jesus because he didn't go through the ritualistic cleansing which, at that time, accompanied every meal.²

In the eyes of God, doing good things does not make a person righteous. Religious service has never saved anyone. Only when our **hearts** conform to the will of God—i.e., humble ourselves and repent—are we made righteous. God says in Hosea 6:6, "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." Conformity to a set of rules and regulations does not make one virtuous. Virtue must be given, and it is only given to those who "give as alms those things that are within...." The heart must be devoted to God before he'll accept anything done by the hands.

The Lord gives six "woes." The term "woe" expresses extreme sadness, particularly in response to a situation so sorrowful there is little hope. The term "alas" is synonymous and, perhaps, a better word to express the sentiment behind the word (e.g., "I love football but, *alas*, I have no talent as a player" "Will you be able to come tomorrow? *Alas*, I cannot." "*Alas*, poor Yorick!"). There is little hope for these Pharisees and lawyers. Jesus even calls them "fools"! The Lord thinks it the height of stupidity to care only for outward appearances and nothing for inward cleanliness.

As we read, you'll notice that the six woes are divided into two sets: **three** are directed to the **Pharisees**, and **three** are addressed to the **lawyers**. And while we could, technically, divide the

² Morris, p. 221.

woes into two even triplets, it is better to see all six as a condemnation of the religious leaders as a whole. After all, the things that the Pharisees are condemned for are similar to those of the lawyers and vice versa. And as is seen by the scene which kicks off this passage, then main issue is **hypocrisy**; the six woes simply illustrate what hypocrisy looks like in a religious context.

The saying goes, "If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck." Likewise, **six traits make a person a hypocrite:**

i. The hypocrite majors on minors.

READ: Luke 11:42 (ESV)

⁴² "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.

Hypocrisy hyper-fixates on things that may be important but are not *as* crucial as others (e.g., miracles vs message). The practice of tithing has weight, but virtues like justice and love are weightier on the scales. Ideally, a person should focus on the most important things and then move to issues of lesser importance.

ii. The hypocrite loves notoriety.

READ: Luke 11:43 (ESV)

⁴³ **Woe** to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

This "greetings in the marketplaces" wasn't a simple hello. Jesus referenced the lengthy and very public honorifics that would be shown to religious elites (e.g., military salute).

Because the hypocrite cares **only** for appearances, they love attention. They're me-monsters. Be wary of those who seek the spotlight; such people often have a closet full of skeletons.

iii. The hypocrite hurts those they "help."

READ: Luke 11:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ **Woe** to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

Hypocrisy **poisons** our relationship with God and **pollutes** the relationship that others have with God. Some of the worst advice you will ever get is from a hypocrite.

iv. **The hypocrite makes religion harder.**

READ: Luke 11:45-46 (ESV)

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶ 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.

The Greek word behind “hard” was a nautical term that referred to a ship’s cargo.³

Washing before a meal was prescribed in the OT (cf. Lev. 15:11). However, it was one washing and one that was only required when a person came in contact with bodily discharge.⁴ By the first century, lawyers insisted that *multiple* washings were necessary to conform to the law of God. The lawyers fortified the walls of the law, while maintaining the loopholes of the law, making them accessible to only a select few (Cf. Matt. 5:33-37).

Listen to how the Psalmist describes the commandments of God: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:7-11).

The lawyers were like evil alchemists. Instead of turning lead to gold, they turned gold to lead and hung God’s word around the necks of the people.

v. **The hypocrite mimics older hypocrites.**

READ: Luke 11:47-51 (ESV)

⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who

³ Bock (1996), 2:1118.

⁴ Edward’s (2015), p. 354.

perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.

The same spirit that drove the Jews to kill the prophets compelled the lawyers to build the prophet's tombs. Basically, Jesus is saying they're finishing what the forebears started.

Have you heard the saying, "The apple doesn't fall from the tree?" This is never more true than with hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the mother of hypocrisy. The hypocrite was fathered by another hypocrite. Followers emulate those they follow (e.g., Jesus/disciples, parents/children, pastors/church members, etc.). "Do as I say and not as I do" has never been taken to heart. People will imitate what they see.

vi. **The hypocrite infects their ignorance on others.**

READ: Luke 11:52-54 (ESV)

⁵² 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."

⁵³ 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, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.

Like unmarked graves, the Pharisees defiled the people. Like a locked door, the lawyers inhibited the people. Beware the instruction of the hypocrite, as there is no actual instruction. Those who have not experienced the truth firsthand cannot hand the truth to others. And in fact, the hypocrite sets a listener on a path away from knowledge. They are like blind guides leading other blind people.

Video Description:

The Road to Redemption | Week 11 | "The Masks We Wear" (Luke 11:37-54)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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