

hypocrisy 101 Luke 6:37-42

Of all the things that our Lord detested and denounces in the course of His ministry on earth, hypocrisy might just top that list. Throughout the Gospels, we see that Jesus' most critical words are usually directed at those whom He calls "hypocrites." We could look in many places in the Gospels to find evidence of this, but the most powerful example is found in our Lord's protracted condemnation of the Pharisees, found in Matthew 23.

- Matthew 23:13-15 – *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.”*
- Matthew 23:25 – *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”*
- Matthew 23:27-29 – *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.”*
- Matthew 23:33 – *“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”*

In that last verse, we hear Jesus proclaiming essentially the same message that we find in our verses this morning, and that is this. Just as surely as selflessness is

a characteristic of those truly redeemed in Christ, hypocrisy is a strong signal of a lost soul.

As we progress through Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, we are blessed to recall that it is much more about identifying who is and is not part of God's Kingdom than it is specifically about ethics. It is, as we have noted, Scripture's ultimate litmus test of true redemption in Christ. We have also noted that the first seven verses (v. 20-26) are essentially Jesus Christ's commentary on the first and greatest commandment to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.*" This second section—in which we found ourselves last week and encounter yet again this morning—is Christ's commentary on what it really looks like when we obey the second greatest commandment to "*love your neighbor as yourself.*"

- This biblical litmus test of redemption reminds me of camping on the Platte River with my dad
- We didn't need a weatherman, for the early morning conditions almost always provided a reliable forecast.
- Early morning dew = Great weather for the day ahead (the more dew the better the day)
- Early morning clouds = Nasty, windy, rainy day (the more clouds, the worse the weather).

Well, in last week's message, we observed the truth that with true faith in Christ comes a lifestyle that will increasingly be characterized by selflessness. In other words, we recognize that, as God's people, we should constantly be growing in an earnest "it's-not-about-me" attitude toward everything, even our enemies. Thus, the selflessness described in verses 27-36 is like that morning dew. Just as the dew indicated a day filled with sunshine, so sincere selflessness is an indication of a heart filled with the Spirit of Christ.

In our verses today, we see the other end of the same spectrum. That is, whereas last week we discussed what loving our neighbor was, this week we will see what it is most decidedly *not*. And in a nutshell, the point is this: loving our neighbor is not and can never be hypocritical. In other words, hypocrisy in the human heart is a lot like those morning clouds. Just as they warned of a day without sunshine, so hypocrisy warns of a heart without the Son of God.

Before we dive into these verses, though, let me begin by offering two cautions to guide our understanding of them. First of all, as we endeavor to understand

these verses, we must be sure not to confuse the judgment and condemnation of which Jesus speaks with either discernment or discipline, for at the same time that Jesus condemns the former, the Bible urgently instructs us to engage in both of the latter.

With that in mind, it is important to note that there is probably no verse in all of Scripture that is taken out of context as often or as egregiously as verse 37, in which Jesus says, *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.”* In fact, Josh McDowell says that this verse has now become the verse most commonly quoted by teenagers today. He also notes that whenever they quote it, they usually apply it in ways that Jesus never intended. In fact, it is most often used by people who do not want to be confronted about their obvious sin. They usually mean something like this: *“The Bible says, ‘Judge not or you will be judged,’ so leave me alone and let me do whatever I want!”*

However, it is absolutely not judgmental to identify sinful behavior. In fact, that is the main goal of discernment! As Proverbs 3:21-22 exhorts, *“My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck,”* and Romans 16:19 says, *“I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.”* The person who refuses to distinguish between right and wrong is certainly not being holy; in fact, he is thinking and behaving like a fool. Proverbs 14:16 says, *“One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless.”* We must not confuse sinful judgment with necessary discernment.

In addition, we must not confuse sinful judging with discipline either. There are few themes more central to the whole Book of Proverbs than the importance of godly discipline. For example, Proverbs 12:1 declares, *“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid,”* and Proverbs 19:18 gives this command, *“Discipline your children while there is hope. If you don't, you will ruin their lives.”* Clearly, then, discernment and discipline are not what Jesus is talking about here. Rather, what He is really condemning is hypocrisy.

Second, when I say that hypocrisy is a strong signal of separation from Christ, please understand that I am not talking about occasional moments of hypocrisy in which we recognize our sin and repent of it. No, hypocritical behavior is bound to come and go from time to time in all of our lives, because, although we have been redeemed in Christ and although we should be growing in His likeness, we have not been made perfect yet. No, that will not happen until we pass from this fallen world and enter into the fullness of God's glory.

- Example – My whining about the girls’ whining.
- Asking them to forgive me for my whining and teaching them why God wants us to have thankful hearts.

You see, occasional instances of hypocrisy are bound to be a lifelong battle that we must be determined to meet with real repentance, and diligently fight by the power of God’s Spirit at work within us. However—and hear this—a life that is *characterized* by hypocritical judging is almost certainly a life cut off from Christ. And that, I believe, is the ultimate message of our text today.

Please allow me to emphasize again that the Sermon on the Mount is not primarily about ethics, but salvation. Don’t get me wrong here: It surely does tell us how to behave, and these verses absolutely do reveal what it does and does not mean to love our neighbor. However, the main purpose of this text is to show us who is and who is not part of God’s kingdom. It differentiates those who walk by the spirit from those who walk by the flesh. In particular, our verses for today tell us that those whose lives are characterized by hypocritical judgment and condemnation simply should not claim to have truly believed and received the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Think back to the blessings and woes of verses 20-26. You see, if we have truly cried out to God to heal our poor broken spirits, how could we chide another for signs of the same spiritual poverty? If we really recognize and understand that we completely lack the spiritual resources needed to please God, how could we scoff at the spiritual bankruptcy of another? When we truly believe that every good thing we have comes from God and from Him alone, how could we deny the riches of His mercy and grace to another in desperate need?

Additionally, the hunger for righteousness that marks the true believer must first and foremost be an intense desire to see God’s holy character manifested in me. If we are routinely critical of others in ways that we are not far more critical of ourselves, then what we are really hungry for is not righteousness; that is the attitude of those hungry for self-justification.

In the third place, if I do not first weep over my own sinful condition, then I cannot really understand the sins of another. On the other hand, the more that we are genuinely broken over our own sin, the better we will understand the call to reach out to others with the matchless mercy of Christ.

Finally, only when I am truly willing to endure the insults and rejection of the world will I really appreciate why insults and rejection have no place among us as God's people.

Let us, then, look at verses again at verses 37-42 again through the lens of salvation. As we do, let us apply this divine litmus test of salvation to our own hearts and lives this morning.

Verse 37 says, *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”* When we view these words through the prism of redemption we ought to hear Jesus warning us that a judgmental heart is a sign of a heart that is still under judgment. We ought to see that a spirit of condemnation is an indication of a spirit that stands condemned. And we forced to acknowledge that an utterly unforgiving person is a person who has probably never been forgiven. And, looking back to verse 36, we must confess that the heart refusing to give mercy is most likely a heart that has never received the mercy Christ died to impart. This same teaching is once again emphasized by Jesus in Parable of the Unmerciful servant, found in Matthew 18:23-35.

Matthew 18:23-35 – *For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. But the man fell down before the king and begged him, “Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.” Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. “Be patient and I will pay it,” he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid in full. When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, “You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart.*

In this parable we see the profound impact of verse 38, where Jesus says, with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. If our hearts are filled with unmerciful condemnation, so will be our fate. Yet, at the same time, if we will freely and abundantly pass along the limitless mercy and grace of God that we have freely received, then Christ promises that an abundance of the same will be lavished upon us. Or in the words of verse 38, *“A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.”* In short, a sure sign that we have received God’s grace is a selfless willingness to give it away.

Look with me now at verses 39 and 40. Here Jesus tells the Parable of the Blind Guides and then gives its explanation, saying, *“Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.”* This verse is very often taken as a warning against following unsound religious teachers, and I can see why. The Pharisees were certainly unsound in their doctrine, and on many different occasions the Bible admonishes us not to follow their false teaching. However, while this interpretation definitely reveals a common biblical theme of extreme importance, I do not think it is the best understanding of this specific parable as it is used in this specific context.

Allow me to explain. We are blessed to notice where this parable occurs. It falls directly in the middle of Christ’s condemnation of sinful judging. Thus, I do not think its message has as much to say about the dangers of false doctrine as it does about the utter futility of hypocrisy. You see, the blind man of verse 39 is the hypocrite who constantly casts judgments and condemnation upon others, yet somehow he fails to see the obvious sin in his own life. And even though he demonstrates precious little knowledge about making necessary changes in his own life, he nonetheless believes that his hypocritical guidance is useful. He is, in fact, the one trying to extract a tiny speck out of his neighbor’s eye, while absurdly ignoring the log extruding from his face.

- In verses 41 and 42, we see the humor of Jesus.
- However, Jesus so fervently denounces hypocritical judging here because such hypocrisy is usually not very funny at all.
- Fred Phelps – Westboro Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas – In Laramie during the Matthew Shepherd frenzy

This man makes a mockery of the Christian faith that he alleges to represent by engaging in a hateful form of the very behavior Jesus rebukes in these verses. Worse yet, he is not in this evil enterprise alone. He has, in fact, attracted,

encouraged, and enabled a whole congregation of followers to join him in his destructive sinful judging.

And this effect is what I believe Jesus is alluding to in verse 40 when He says “*A student is not above his teacher.*” The point here is this: We are foolish at best and evil at worst if we expect to produce Christlikeness in others through hypocrisy. When Jesus says, “*Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher,*” we ought to understand that hypocritical judges only have the power to produce more of the same. In other words, if we hypocritically condemn others, the only thing we can expect to get in return is more hypocrites! That is surely the story of Fred Phelps, and it will be the story of our lives, our families, and our church as well if we do not carefully heed these commands of Christ.

Let me give you some examples, dear friends, to illustrate the central point of this passage. It is hypocrisy to condemn others for not helping us from if we have only ever lives for ourselves. It is hypocrisy to judge others for not meeting our needs if we have rarely lifted a finger to help them. Furthermore, have you ever noticed how the people who give the most criticism tend to be the same people who demand the most encouragement? In the same way, it is astounding how those who most hate to be gossiped about are usually the very same people who will most readily talk behind your back.

The hypocritical judging that Christ deplores in our text often rears its ugly head in parenting as well. Do you frequently whine at your children, and yet censure them when they do the same? Do we rebuke our children for not giving their best at school, and yet speak and act halfheartedly about our jobs, forgetting Colossians 3:23, which says, “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men?*” Do we expect them to be wholeheartedly devoted to God, and yet model precious little affection for Christ in our daily lives? Please don’t get me wrong here, we cannot be content to let our children be whiny or lazy or worldly. However, if we want our instructions to them to mean anything at all, then we must first be determined to make any necessary changes in our own lives.

And children, you do not get off the hook so easily this morning either. Let me ask you: Do you trash your parents for not listening to what you want while showing little proof that you are listening to them? Do you demand the freedom to make your own decisions even though you keep making bad ones?

Please understand that I am in no way saying that we have to live perfect lives. To do so is, of course, impossible in this life. However—hear this—we should always expect more of ourselves than we expect of anyone else. Let me say that again, we should always expect more of ourselves than we expect of anyone else. Any other attitude is hypocrisy, plain and simple. // This, you see, is hypocrisy 101.

Let us never condemn others for the sins we are neglecting in our own lives. It is o.k., even good, to help another make changes in his life. However, it is only appropriate if we are not all the more willing to make any necessary changes in ourselves.

Application

Are the problems in your life always someone else's fault? For example, Are the failed or strained relationships in your life always because of the other person? Please, let us take this opportunity to ask ourselves, "Where in our lives are we expecting other's to do more than expect of ourselves?"

In addition, we are blessed to consider the times when we are most irritated in life. Chances are that whatever irritates you the most is the very sin that you most critically need to overcome. Do whiners bother you the most? Chances are that you are struggling with an unthankful heart. Do unexpected inconveniences cause you to sin? Chances are that you are struggling to give God control.

Finally, let me ask you what I think is the most relevant question to ask regarding our Scripture passage this morning: Of whom are you expecting the most this morning—yourself or someone else? // The redeemed in Christ should always be people who take the plank out of our own eyes before looking to remove the speck from another's.

Let those of us who have been saved through the sacrifice of our Lord, Jesus Christ, live lives that reflect the mercy we have received. Let us each one call on God and apply the strength He gives us to fight back the hypocrisy that separates us from Him and destroys our witness to a watching world. And if this hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks characterizes your life today, perhaps you need to turn to Him for the very first time... Pray.