

Overcome our Hypocrisy
Matthew 15:1-20; March 26, 2017

Have you ever heard anyone say, “All of you Christians are just a bunch of hypocrites.” The sad reality is that often times they are right. You know why this is a big deal? Here’s why. I agree with Tim Keller when he says, “Churches that are filled with self-righteous, exclusive, insecure, angry moralistic people are extremely unattractive” (Keller, Reason for God, 179). When non believers smell hypocrisy, it’s repulsive, revolting and repelling. Here’s what we’re going to do today. We’re going to diagnose and define hypocrisy and then I’m going to plead with you to repent of and overcome hypocrisy for your sake and for the sake of many in our city who need Jesus and a healthy church.

Read Matthew 15:1-20

Jesus doesn’t hold back on these religious leaders of his day. He calls them “hypocrites” and “blind guides.” Playing off of these two words, I want to warn about three blind spots of hypocrisy that arise from the text.

I. Hypocrites claim to honor God but neglect to keep his Word (1-6).

The context for this passage:

- The question asked in verse two by the Pharisees and scribes sets the context for this entire passage: “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?”
 - The Pharisees and scribes were some of the highest ranking religious leaders of the day and this “tradition of the elders” was a collection of “oral teaching” that was basically commentary on how to apply the law in the OT. Today you can go read this “oral tradition” in a book called *The Mishnah*.
 - It was this “oral teaching” that contained detailed instructions for ritual cleanliness, including the washing of hands before a meal and that’s what Jesus’ disciples got called out over (the entire section called *Yadiah* dealt with ritual cleanliness). Just to give you a taste, the laws detailed out how much water was to be used and this differed depending on whether one or both hands were being washed.
 - Ills: To us this might sound silly or even remind you of some of the fights your kids get in: “Daddy, Owen didn’t wash his hands.”
 - So what’s the big deal? Verse 20 makes it explicit (cf. Mark 7:2). According to the Pharisees and scribes, since the disciples ate without washing their hands, they were defiled and unclean.

Transition: this is what sets the stage for Jesus’ response and teaching in the rest of this passage. In fact, Jesus doesn’t initially really answer their questions but rather gives a counterattack (so D. A. Carson).

Jesus' counterattack:

- If Jesus' would've directly answered their question, he would've said something like this, "There's no law in the "commandment" or "word" of God, the OT, that says you'll be spiritual unclean if you eat without washing your hands. So your "oral tradition" means very little me and my disciples."
- Jesus draws a clear distinction between their "tradition" and the "commandment" or "word" of God and he actually chooses to use a different issue than the one the Pharisees and scribes wanted to discuss. He chooses the 5th commandment.
- God's Word commands this:
 - Honor your parents (Exod. 20:12). This is the positive way of saying it.
 - If you revile or curse your parents, you deserve to be put to death (Exod. 21:17). These are the negative consequences of not honoring your parents.
- Your "tradition" says this:
 - The practice of "Corban" (see Mark 7:11) says you can devote certain monies or properties to God, aka, "the temple," before your death so that no one but yourself could benefit from them while you were still alive. Since you've given them to "God" they can't be used to care for your parents.

Summary: they elevated their tradition to be as authoritative as the Word of God such that it basically nullified and made void the Word of God.

Application: Here's how we are tempted to do the very same thing.

- What commands of God do you find ways to avoid?
- "I know God says this but..."
- What commands of God are you most tempted to find a way around?
- Where tradition do you follow, either your own or someone else's, at the expense and neglect of following God's Word.

II. Hypocrites practice religious worship but ignore the demands of justice (7-9).

The context of Isaiah:

- Jesus quotes Isaiah 29:13, a verse from 800 years earlier, just as it Isaiah was speaking to the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day.
- By quoting and applying this verse, Jesus is saying that the religious leaders of his day aren't too dissimilar from the Jews that the prophet Isaiah preached to.
- We're going to look at the "heart" issue in more detail in our third blind spot, but right now I want to press in on a blind spot that might not be so evident.
- Tim Challies, in his article on God and hypocrisy says this, "God also hates worship that follows the letter of the law while violating its spirit. . . . God wants nothing to do with such worship. He will not tolerate worship that follows the prescribed rituals while ignoring the demands of justice" (Challies).
- This is really what Isaiah was speaking against in his day:

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations--I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isaiah 1:11-17 ESV; cf. 58:5-7)

If we claim to be followers of Jesus, then our hearts should beat for the justice issues that Jesus' heart beats for.

- Tim Keller, in his chapter in *The Reason for God* where he addresses the objection of hypocrisy that critics use against Christianity, also notes, “In Jesus’s and the prophets’ critique, self-righteous religion is always marked by insensitivity to issues of social justice, while true faith is marked by profound concern for the poor and marginalized” (Keller, Reason for God, 60).

There’s nothing we could do more to remove the repulsive, revolting and repelling smell of hypocrisy than to really, and I mean, really and genuinely care for the least of these in our city. This will show me that we are caring less and less about ourselves and more and more about the needs of others. That kind of sacrificial life will be a powerful testimony to our savior, Jesus Christ.

III. Hypocrites focus on external righteousness but fail to address the heart (10-20).

At the heart of hypocrisy is pretending to be someone on the outside that is inconsistent with what is happening on the inside.

- Hypocrisy is to put on a show.
- Hypocrisy is “theatrical religion” (Tim Challies).
- “The hypocrite is the Christian who uses the veneer of public virtue to cover the rot of private vice” (Kevin DeYoung).

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23:27-28 ESV)

- This was me. I stand here and share with you today as a former religious hypocrite. I learned how to be a pretty good actor while in high school and my early college years while I rotted with the private vice of lust and pornography on the inside. I know what it’s

like to bear the weight of having to continually hide your sin from others so that you don't get caught.

- Why do we do this? Because we care more about what others think about us than what God thinks of us. If we're going to overcome hypocrisy, we've got to get over ourselves and our reputation.

The first step in the way forward to overcoming hypocrisy is understanding this point: your greatest problem isn't outside of you but inside of you. It's your heart.

- It's not what goes into your mouth (food) that defiles you but it's what flows out of your heart (vv. 10-11).
 - What you put in your mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled (v. 17)
 - What comes out of your mouth flows from the heart and this is what defiles you (v. 18).
 - The centrality of the heart:

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23 ESV)

- "The heart is the steering wheel of every human being. Everything we do is shaped and controlled by what our hearts desire" (Lane and Tripp, 17).
- The wickedness of the heart: Jesus presupposes that the heart is essentially evil.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

- What flows out of the heart?
 - Evil thoughts
 - Murder: 6th commandment
 - Adultery: 7th commandment
 - Sexual Immorality
 - Theft: 8th commandment
 - False witness: 9th commandment
 - Slander
- Jesus' point: you do what you do because of what is in your heart.
 - Getting this point is essential for understanding how you can change and how you can help others change (evangelism, group leaders, parenting).

Transition: As tempting as it would be to think that the solution is just to "turn over a new leaf" and start trying harder; this won't solve the problem. C. S. Lewis says the solution is this: "If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be plowed up and re-sown" (C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, 198).

- Each and every one of us need an entire heart transformation and this is the good news of

Jesus and the point of my entire sermon today.

The Point: Jesus overcomes our hypocrisy by changing us from the inside out.

IV. Jesus overcomes our hypocrisy by changing us from the inside out.

- The message of the gospel is that God transforms our lives by transforming our hearts. As Tim Keller says, “Religion is outside in, but the gospel is inside out.” This is the implicit application of Jesus’ words in Matthew 15. If what flows out of your mouth proceeds from the heart, then a transformed heart will produce worship that is not in vain but pleasing to God.
- This was one of the main promises of the new covenant in the OT that the Pharisees and scribes were completely blind to.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, (Ezekiel 11:19 ESV; see also Ezek. 36:24-28; Jer. 31:33)

- This is what the NT means when it talks about being “born again” or a “new creation” (John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17). Christian conversion is a supernatural thing. When the heart is changed there’s not just new deacons but new affections and new feelings.
- Jesus changes us when we first respond to him inwardly, simply repenting of our sin and placing our faith in him.

Conclusion:

The gospel frees us from the constant need to cover up and hide our sin because it tells us that God accepts us not because of how great we are but because of how great Jesus is. As a result, we daily boast in his righteousness and trust in his perfect sacrifice for all of our sins. When we do this collectively as a church, it will be so life giving to those not only in the church, but outside the church. Instead of repelling people with the stench of hypocrisy, God will use us to attract people with the aroma of Jesus who invites all people, including hypocrites, into a relationship with himself.