

Four Marks of a Religious Hypocrite (Luke 11:37-44)

Hypocrisy: a deficiency of integrity between public persona and private character. The “gap” between what is said or done publicly, including the content and motives of the heart, often manifests itself in a “double” life (though not always, at least initially). What one is in private is not what one displays in public. Hypocrisy is always a sin, but not all sinners are always hypocrites.

Context: As Jesus spoke to the crowds, including Pharisees and Scribes, concerning matters of the kingdom, light, darkness, the eye, and the body (v.37), He was invited to a Pharisee’s house (v.37). Why was Jesus invited to the home of the Pharisee? Were there ulterior motives?

1. The religious hypocrite is more concerned with outward appearance than inward godliness (v.39-41)

- Jesus consented to the Pharisee’s invitation and “reclined” with him. It may have been the Sabbath, as reclining was often the posture for a Sabbath meal (Lk. 14:10; 17:7), and it may be a separate account from Matthew 23.
- Why did the Pharisees invite Jesus over? This is the fourth of seven banquet scenes in Luke (5:29; 7:36; 9:16; 11:37; 14:1; 22:14; 24:29-30) and one of three hosted by a Pharisee (7:36; 11:37; 14:1).

The offense of Jesus:

- The OT addresses washing when one has touched bodily discharge or any other kind of defilement (Lev. 15:11-23). The washing of the inside/outside is for utensils (Lev. 11:32-33; 15:12) according to unclean meat that defiles a clay pot.
- The Pharisees had expanded this to include interactions with people. The washing of the hands up to their arm was in proportion to perceived “uncleanliness” and engagement with other sinners, including the Gentiles.

The rebuke of Jesus:

- He refuses to accommodate the traditions of the Pharisees and wash His hands.
 - Lively discussions at the “table” are always expected and welcomed. However, Jesus’ comments would have been viewed as vitriolic by the host and those in attendance.
 - He violates every social and cultural norm of the host/guest by rebuking and sorrowing over not only this Pharisee but also the culture of the Pharisees.
- Jesus’ following “woes” toward the Pharisees (soon-to-be scribes (lawyers)) is a word of “sadness” and “sorrow” over their condition.
- His rebuke is like the prophets of old (Isa. 1:10-17; 58:4-8; Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8).
- Jesus is exercising the principle of loving in the truth and being truthful in love.
- Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus is concerned with inward cleansing, not outward and external washing. This is thematic with His teaching of light and darkness (v.33-36).
- He accuses the Pharisees of “greed” and “wickedness.”
 - Greed is taking advantage of others by robbing and plundering them, and wickedness is meticulous attention to outward appearance and neglect of inner purity. It is the contrast between cosmetic exterior and interior decay.

2. The religious hypocrite is more concerned about personal preferences, traditions, and dead orthodoxy than the critical matters that concern love for God and others (v.42)

- Pharisee means “separate ones.” They were formed as a response after the return of Jews following the Babylonian and Assyrian captivity to retain their “distinction” as God’s chosen people.
- The Pharisees sought to recover the stipulations of the Mosaic Law and established oral traditions, beginning in the 5th century, known as the Mishnah and the Talmud. These are compilations of writings that sought to put a “fence” around the Mosaic law so that God’s Torah (instruction) would not be violated.

- There were thousands of these man-made “rules” that were falsely equivocated with Scripture.
- The traditions of men have plagued millions of Christians, causing unnecessary divisions.
- Questions every Christian must ask when navigating “traditions” and “personal preferences”:
 - What does Scripture speak about this? Will God be pleased by this? Is this a personal preference or principled? Is it too principled beyond the principle?

The religious hypocrite will appear to be generous but is calculated and cheap (v.42):

A. Tithing:

- The Torah required Israelites to set aside a tenth of all that their fields produced yearly (Deut. 14:22) to support worship centers and the Levites, including foreigners, fatherless, and widows (Deut. 14:28-29). Other elements under the theocracy elevated the total percentage of “offerings” to over 30%, including mandatory and free will offerings.
- The Pharisees tithed (gave 10%) on everything that the Torah did not prescribe, not because they were generous but because they wanted to appear generous. They were lovers of money (16:14).
- There is no New Testament “tithing” other than a “generous” and “joyful” giver (2 Cor. 8-9).
- The alms to the poor do not have any equivalency today. The principle is that in loving your neighbor, you meet needs that should be met, not merely could.
- The antidote to greed is generous giving. Being generous is the opposite of being greedy. Generous giving is medicine for the soul which heals greed that consumes people.

B. Love and Law:

- The Pharisees majored in minors and minored in majors. They did not interpose and intercede for those in need outside of the synagogue and failed to uphold the content of the law, which is love toward their neighbor. This includes justice and righteousness (Mic. 6:8).

3. The religious hypocrite is motivated by public recognition and praise (v.43)

- The praise of man drives the Pharisees. Everything they do is to be acknowledged by men.
- Renowned and respected men typically received the front seats in the synagogue, facing those in attendance. It was a social and cultural sign of importance.
- They loved to be greeted by all kinds of names of honor.

4. The religious hypocrite is spiritually dead. He may or may not be deceived about it (v.44)

- In Israel, contact with the dead, including their final resting place (grave), defiled a person for seven days (Lev. 21:1-4, 11). It was customary to whitewash tombs (Matt. 23:27-28) every Spring so the Torah-observing Israelites would not unwillingly encounter them.
- It was especially important for priests and Levites, for whom a seven-day defilement might render them unfit for temple service.
- It is uncertain whether it meant that the Pharisees were like walking dead and that those in contact with them (their followers) became unclean just as they would by contact with a dead body (Num. 9:6-10; Lev. 21:1-4, 11). Another possibility is that their followers were not conscious that contact with the Pharisees’ teaching was death-giving, as the Pharisees were conduits of moral and spiritual defilement to those they encountered.

The most difficult to win to repentance are those who are “religious” or think they are in Christ when they are spiritually dead:

- Both groups (religious and the deceived) need the gospel in an honest, earnest pleading for the position and condition of their soul.
- In doing so, you may sever the intimacy of the relationship (judgmentalism and tension from their perspective), or you may win them to repentance and Christ.
- Concern for the souls of men takes precedence over any fear of the potential outcomes. Love God and the religious hypocrite, and trust God with the outcome.