

A Warning To Hypocrites

Luke 20:45-47

November 9, 2014

Rev. Greg L. Price

A hypocrite is one who plays a role. A hypocrite is one who has a form of godliness, but denies the power of the Holy Spirit to actually change his/her heart, affections, goals, dreams, and the very reason for living. Hypocrites are members of the Church. They sit in the congregation and listen to the preaching of God's Word and even at times are moved by it, but it does not change their hearts and affections. Hypocrites may even stand behind the pulpit and pretend to preach in the name of Christ, but do not submit to God's Word out of faith in and love for Jesus Christ.

This the scribes and the Pharisees also did, for they were hypocrites who merely played a role in pretending to be righteous without looking to Christ at all as their righteousness, but rather seeking to be right before on the basis of their own works of righteousness.

The Lord tells us to beware of hypocrites in the passage that is before us today (a warning to us all that none of us be hypocrites), and particularly to beware of hypocrites who pose as leaders and guides within the Church. How are hypocrites discerned? (1) By Their Public Desires (Luke 20:45-46); and (2) By Their Gross Contradictions (Luke 20:47).

I. How Are Hypocrites Discerned? By Their Public Desires (Luke 20:45-46).

A. Our text in Luke 20:45-47 gives to us the last recorded words of our Lord to the multitudes before His death. They are words of warning similar to those of the Apostle Paul in Acts 20:29-30. If there was any doubt in the minds of the people as to the character of the scribes and

Pharisees in general, Christ pulls back the curtains to expose them for who they are: hypocrites.

1. All of us as Christians fall into the sin of hypocrisy at times where we sinfully go through the motions of our worship and obedience with our hearts far away from the Lord. Christ and His righteousness are not upon our minds. A hungering and thirsting for Christ is not within our hearts. When we have not prepared ourselves to worship and glorify the Lord due to our preoccupation with the world or our love for the things of the world, we fall into the sin of hypocrisy. This is a most grievous sin, dear Christian. How we must seek the face of the Lord that we avoid such sins of hypocrisy in our lives. How we should grieve and mourn that we have treated our gracious Savior with such a patronizing and mercenary spirit. It is like when our children outwardly listen to what we say to them, but it is obvious that their minds are a million miles away. Outwardly they give the appearance of listening, but inwardly they wish they were somewhere else.

2. Yes, Christians fall into the sin of hypocrisy, but falling into the sin of hypocrisy and being a hypocrite are not necessarily the same thing. For a hypocrite does not look to Christ as his/her righteousness and only hope of eternal salvation. A hypocrite does not grieve and mourn over his/her hypocrisy. A hypocrite does not sincerely seek the forgiveness of God or endeavor new obedience. A hypocrite continues in his/her hypocrisy thinking that mere outward conformity to certain standards of the law will merit the approval of God and win the applause of people. This is the hypocrite of whom Christ here speaks. What the Gospel of Luke here abbreviates in three verses, the Gospel of Matthew there elaborates in a whole chapter (Matthew 23—8 woes).

B. Our text in Luke 20:45 indicates that the Lord addressed these words in the hearing of not only His disciples but also in the hearing of the multitude gathered within the temple: “Then in the audience of all

the people he said unto his disciples (Matthew 23:1: “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples.”). Here the Lord gave a public warning against the scribes and the Pharisees. Let no one, therefore, think it inappropriate or contrary to the principle of charity to warn the flock of Christ against all apostasy and hypocrisy evident within the professing Church today. For, dear ones, there are many false teachers and deceivers who speak in the name of Christ, but are really hypocrites (1 John 4:1). But in doing so, let us as ministers always do so with humility, looking to our own sins first, and with charity, looking to reclaim all who have departed from the right ways of the Lord.

C. In Luke 20:46, the Lord Jesus commands the people and His disciples to beware, to watch out for these scribes and Pharisees, lest they be deceived and misled by them (in Matthew 15:14 the Lord had actually commanded His own disciples to separate from the Pharisees). Notice now that the Lord describes the character of these hypocrites by the various desires or loves within their lives what characterized the desire and love of the scribes and Pharisees?

1. First, the scribes and the Pharisees desired to appear outwardly holy before men (“which desire to walk in long robes”). What is wrong with this? An important clue is given in the parallel passage (Matthew 23:5).

a. Phylacteries were little boxes worn by the Pharisees upon their foreheads and around their wrists which contained certain sections of the law of God. This practice was begun by them in the generation or so before the birth of Christ. It was never authorized by the Lord, but rather was the result of interpreting Deuteronomy 6:8-9 in an unnatural literal fashion (for such was never the practice of Moses or any of the prophets of God in the Old Testament or even of Christ Himself). Phylacteries as worn by the Pharisees were a mere outward show of religion. They did so in order to attract the attention of the people to

them as being especially holy in keeping the law of God.

b. The second way that the Pharisees appeared holy before men (according to Christ in Matthew 23:5) was by enlarging the borders (or tassels) of their robes. This would seem to be that to which the Lord alludes in Luke 20:46 when He states that the Pharisees love to appear before men in “long robes.” These borders (or tassels) upon the garments of the Israelites were actually authorized by God (in Numbers 15:37-41). These blue tassels upon the bottom of their robes reminded them that they were a people purchased by God unto Himself, and therefore they were to love His commandments and to obey Him from hearts filled with gratitude for all that He had accomplished for them. These blue tassels did not speak of the law in the hands of an avenging Judge, but rather of the law in the hands of a merciful Mediator who Himself should fulfil all of the obedience required in the Covenant of Grace (Luke 8:44—she laid hold by faith of “the border of his garment” i.e. the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ rather than clinging to the border of her own garment).

c. Thus, what the Pharisees had done by way of their outward appearance was to extend the length of these tassels or ribbons on their robes so as to appear more holy than anyone else.

(1) Ministers must be ever so careful not to draw the gaze, the stares, and the attention of others to themselves by the way that they dress, speak, and behave (Rome’s ministry hereby condemned by their ornate miters, robes, crosses, crucifixes, which has no divine sanction in the New Testament—whereas Christ has never told us to wear any such thing, but to be different by our words and deeds). For as ministers of Christ, it is not we who should be the focal point of the people, but rather Christ. We are merely ambassadors declaring the riches of His grace and mercy.

(2) As ministers we should despise the limelight as a means of promoting our own gifts and graces. Our whole mindset as

ministers should be, “Christ must increase, but I must decrease.” Like John the Baptist we must be “a voice crying in the wilderness”.

c. That is the first love of these hypocrites: a love to appear outwardly holy, but no hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Christ in the inner man. Dear ones, where is your greatest spiritual energy expended—in a display of outward holiness or in hungering and thirsting after Christ? Outward holiness is necessary, but let our focus be upon the heart and affections (inward holiness) and the outward will naturally flow from it.

2. Second, the scribes and the Pharisees desired the titles of authority and scholarship (“and love greetings in the markets”). Again let us look at the parallel passage in Matthew 23:7-12. The Pharisees coveted the title of rabbi (literally, “great one” which was used for highly acclaimed teachers of Israel). When they went into public places or market places, they loved to hear their knowledge and authority praised before men. This was the fuel that kept their engines going. They lived for this acclamation and notoriety. They did not teach nor preach because of the call of God upon their lives. They did not expound the Word due to a love for the people in order that the people might know the one true living God and have life by His grace.

a. Likewise, we as ministers must be ever so careful not to flaunt our learning, our knowledge, our titles, or our degrees before people. The pride of knowledge will prove to be the downfall of a faithful Christ-honoring ministry. This is not to say that ministers should rather desire to be ignorant or timid when it comes to the truth. Absolutely not! However, our knowledge should not be seen as drawing attention to ourselves, but rather to Christ and His Word. If people desire to call us ministers, or Rev., or Pastor (just as our spiritual fathers of the First and Second Reformations were called, divines—because they were well schooled in divinity), that is fine, but let us in no way insist upon such titles or glory in such titles. Paul certainly did not cling to the title of

“apostle” and neither should we cling to any such titles. He could glory in his religious learning (if he had chosen to do so according to Acts 22:3), but he rather chose to glory in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). Respect for the minister will ultimately not be based upon a title, but upon his doctrine and character (and so will it be true of us all).

b. When Christ teaches that ministers should not be called rabbi, father, or master (in Matthew 23:8-12), He is not forbidding the use of all titles, for Paul refers to himself as a father (1 Cor. 4:15), a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher (2 Timothy 1:11). Christ is rather forbidding the title of father, rabbi, or master in an absolute sense as lords over the consciences of people (Rome’s ministry hereby condemned, which has established such titles as the Vicar of Christ = antichrist, a usurper of Christ). Rather than being lords over the consciences of God’s people, ministers are to be servants who humbly minister on behalf of Christ to all who need Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:24).

3. Thirdly, the scribes and the Pharisees desired special favors and honors given and bestowed in the presence of others (“and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts”).

a. The chief seat in the synagogue was a bench which faced the congregation and was placed nearest to the box containing the Law of God. It would be like those special seats of honor facing the congregation given to guest preachers or those leading in worship. Why are such seats necessary? Why should the attention of the people be upon those sitting in those seats? Why give these men any more temptation in dealing with matters of pride than they inherently have by giving them such conspicuous seats? Why shouldn’t they sit and worship among God’s people in the least conspicuous manner?

b. The chief rooms at feasts do not actually refer to rooms or cubicles, but rather to the chief places at feasts (room in this case refers to the spot where the honored guest at a feast was placed).

The guest of honor was always placed nearest to the host.

c. The Pharisees loved and coveted to be publicly honored. They did not shy away from public praise, but rather ran to it. How ministers must guard themselves from this evil, for even though we may not blow our own horn, we may sinfully covet others to do so on our behalf, which is essentially desiring what the Pharisees loved. Because the ministry (by the very nature of the office) puts one into a public setting so much of the time, we as ministers must continually beware of the temptation within our own hearts to be honored in front of others. None of us are guiltless in this regard, but by God's grace we must put to death this sin lest it lead us away from the simplicity of the gospel into the pomp and circumstance of Rome, where the pope rides not upon a donkey, but rather sits upon a throne within a palace.

II. How Are Hypocrites Discerned? By Their Contradictions (Luke 20:47).

A. The specific contradiction in life here mentioned is (on the one hand) that of taking the money and property of ignorant and helpless widows, and (on the other hand) that of making a show before the people that they are so interested in the things of God as indicated by their long prayers (not that there is anything wrong with a long prayer in itself—what is condemned is the contradiction of the hypocrite that fleeces the flock and then acts so pious in order to impress the congregation). Hypocrites will reveal not only inconsistencies (which all Christians do in their profession and practice to some degree), but will also reveal gross contradictions between what they profess and what they practice. Such ministers will live one way when they are in the presence of the congregation, but will live altogether differently when with their families, or when by themselves where no one can observe their behavior. Hypocrites are blinded to the truth that the one true living

God hears all that we say when we are alone and sees all that we watch or do when we are alone. As Christians we realize our inability to perfectly keep God's commandments (and therefore the inconsistencies that arise from this), but Christians are not content to live such a lie. Christians seek the grace and mercy of Christ for help to live in sincerity before the Lord. Christians grieve and sorrow over their inconsistencies rather than glorying in them. Christians hate when they fall into sin, are ashamed of the dishonor brought to Christ, and take seriously the estrangement their sin brings to their fellowship with Christ. Christians look to the righteousness of Christ and the forgiveness of Christ as their only hope of eternal salvation, and endeavor new obedience unto the Lord.

B. The minister must not covet riches or wealth in this life. He must seek not to be wealthy in this life, but rather to be faithful wherever that will lead him (yet that is so much of the focus of those on tv and the radio). He is willing to minister to the flock of Christ whether he is employed full time or whether he can only be employed part time. The ministry for a faithful minister does not revolve around the love of money or the love of comforts, but around the love of Christ and needy people.

C. Do not fail to see the greater damnation that rests upon the hypocrite who pretends to minister in the Church (Luke 20:47). This implies degrees of punishment in hell for those who have lived such lies (Matthew 7:21-23).

D. What are the precursors and warning signs of hypocrisy that should alert us to hypocrisy in our own lives?

1. No enjoyment of Christ and fellowship with Him—leaving Christ as our first love.

2. Going through the motions of worship without due

preparation. Not coming into the presence of God with awe and wonder as to who He is and what He has done in rescuing you.

3. Obedience is more to please man (and to receive the applause of man) than to please God and to glorify Him.
4. Making excuses for your sin—blaming others for your sin.
5. Having a critical heart and spirit toward others—double standard—not judging yourself before you judge others (Matthew 7).
6. Not mourning and grieving over your sin as first and foremost an offense against the holiness and goodness of a gracious God.
7. Practicing a self-righteousness.

Finally, hear this last thought as I close. Dear child of God, you are not a hypocrite because you see within yourself a battle between the Spirit of God and your own evil desires (the Apostle Paul did as well in Romans 7). For to see and to acknowledge that battle inside you (and me), and to confess your struggles with the flesh (and mine), and to call out to God in faith that He would overcome the sin in your life and grant you the holy affections and fruit that you need is to be a sincere and honest Christian rather than a deceiving and lying hypocrite. One is not a hypocrite who sees his/her hypocrisy and hates it and seeks to overcome it by God's wondrous grace. One is not a hypocrite who looks to Christ as his/her only righteousness before the bar of God's infinite justice and endeavors new obedience to the commandments of God out of love for Christ. That my friends is a Christian who is being sanctified by the power of God's Spirit, who is denying himself, taking up his cross, and following Christ. There is hope for the hypocrite. Hypocrisy is not the unpardonable sin. But the hypocrite must confess his/her hypocrisy to Christ, seek His forgiveness, and turn from it casting it upon Christ. There is no hope for the hypocrite outside of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, et al.) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.