

Beware of Hypocrisy  
Luke 11:37-12:3  
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Read Luke 11:37-12:3

*“The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.”* (Psalm 12:6)

## **Introduction**

How many of you know the name Mike Warnke? Back in the day (the 80's), he was the best Christian comedian around. I wasn't allowed to listen to Eddie Murphy or Andrew Dice Clay when I was a teenager, so it was either Bill Cosby or some no-so-funny Christian comedians. When I found Mike Warnke tapes, I listened to them over and over. Not only was he laugh-out loud funny, but he had this amazing testimony of his pre-Christian life that included being in Vietnam in the Navy and deep involvement in Satanism. He wrote a book called *The Satan Seller* in which he told of being orphaned as a child, becoming a drug dealer, and then finding his way into a Satanic cult, where he rose to the level of high priest with 1,500 followers. A heroin overdose and an attempt on his life made him leave the cult, join the Navy, and head to Vietnam where he was injured in battle and received a Purple Heart award. He became a Christian at the end of his time in the Navy and then became a popular speaker, occult expert, and stand-up comedian.

Except that very little of that was true. Enter Cornerstone Magazine, an independent Christian magazine based in Chicago, that published a huge exposé of Warnke's lies and hypocrisy in 1992.<sup>1</sup> His dates of allegedly being in a Satanic cult were undercut by the fact that he had been volunteering with Campus Crusade for Christ and that people who knew him in those years knew him as a straight-laced, innocent kid. He was never a drug dealer and though he served in the Navy, it was at a desk not on the front lines. His claim to have two Master's Degrees and a doctorate were proven false. Every comedian stretches the truth to some extent, but Mike Warnke had made up an entire lifetime of lies. In addition, there were severe moral failures: Warnke had been married four times, usually leaving his current wife after starting an affair with the next one, and there was massive mishandling of ministry funds as well as tax evasion.

I wouldn't say that I was devastated when I read the article. I had certainly been in church long enough to know that not every Christian leader was living the greatest life of integrity. I was more amazed at the gall of this man who figured that the bigger his lies and the messier his life was, the less people would question him, apparently. And then he tried to hide behind statements like, "The Christian church is the only army that shoots its own wounded." I couldn't imagine someone building his life and ministry on such massive hypocrisy.

Our Scripture passage today shows us two sets of Christian leaders who had built their lives and ministries on hypocrisy. They looked great and holy from the outside, they had everyone fooled; but Jesus came and pointed right to the places where, though they were fooling others, they weren't fooling God. As much as the Church may think that its biggest danger comes from the outside – from secular forces and religious persecution – Jesus' words in today's passage reminds us that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20060212105143/http://www.cornerstonemag.com/features/iss098/sellingsatan.htm>

nothing is deadlier to true godliness than spiritual hypocrisy and religious activity that is far from God. Our hearts must be right before we can think and act in ways that honor Him.

Let's read again the first eight verses to see what bothered Jesus about

### **I. When You Set Your Own Standard of Holiness (11:37-44)**

*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. 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. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. 44 Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."*

This is the second time that a Pharisee has had Jesus over for dinner in the Gospel of Luke. The first time (back in Luke 7), Simon the Pharisee, was angry because a sinful woman came in and anointed Jesus with oil and wept over Him; but Jesus' rebuke was of Simon's failing to extend common courtesies to Him. This time, it was the Pharisee host who rebuked Jesus for failing to wash before dinner. This wasn't so much a hygiene issue as an issue of keeping the traditions of the elders, though it was not breaking God's law. I think that Jesus had purposely not washed His hands so that He could make some scathing points about the Pharisees' hypocrisy. You should probably think twice before you invite Jesus to dinner, especially if you're planning on criticizing Him!

The Pharisee wasn't just a little disappointed that Jesus didn't wash His hands, he was astonished! We've seen a lot of people astonished at Jesus for things in the Gospel of Luke, but it's usually because He cast out a demon or healed a leper. But this Pharisee had his mind blown because Jesus didn't keep this extraneous rule like he thought all good followers of God should. The Pharisees were the guys that you would have thought Jesus would appreciate: they tried to live a straight life that pleased God (at least externally), they defended the faith, knew the Scriptures and the law well, they were considered the holiest people in Israel. But the problem was that they added to the Bible – they went well beyond the bounds of Scripture as to what was acceptable behavior. Washing before dinner was a perfect example: "We made a rule, Jesus, why aren't you following it?" And Jesus came back with, "Hey, I made the original rules, let's talk about how you're doing with those."

Jesus' main charge against the Pharisees is verse 39 – they knew how to clean the outside but not the inside. Their lives were the cups that looked good outwardly, but were filthy, greedy and wicked, on the inside. Verse 40 points out how ridiculous this is: God made both our outsides and insides. "You're so worried about clean hands, but what about a clean heart? You've got outwardly good deeds, but if they don't flow from a godly heart, they're no good."

Then there are three woes or reasons for rebuke:

-The first woe, verse 42 – You tithe but neglect justice and loving God. What was Jesus saying about them tithing mint and herbs? It's that they were so meticulous that even when they grew a tiny plant, they made sure to give a tenth of that to the synagogue. That's pretty strict and conscientious. But at the same time they were totally oblivious to helping people get justice in their courts and loving God. Do we let our acts of giving to the church or to charities let us off the hook from actually loving God and loving other people? Jesus says that we need to do all of those things.

Don't stop giving, but keep giving sacrificially, as well as giving yourself over to the worship and work of God, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

-The second woe, verse 43 – The Pharisees loved being noticed and praised, they lived for that. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 has so much to say about not practicing righteousness before others in order to be seen and praised by them. Instead, we are not to let our left hand know what our right hand is doing; in other words: do virtuous things in secret, not trying to get credit, not trying to draw attention to them. The opposite of what the Pharisees did. When people fail to praise you for the good you've done, your heavenly Father has seen it and will reward you. Do you love to be honored and praised more than you are willing to humbly follow God with no credit? Prepare for Jesus' rebuke if you do.

-The third woe, verse 44 – Other people were led astray by the Pharisees uncleanness. Their legalism and hypocrisy was a form of death. They were "Typhoid Marys" (that was in my Pastor's Thought email that you'll have to go back and read if you don't understand the reference). They were supposed to help lead others to life, but their lives were more like filthy graves that weren't even marked so that people would know to avoid them.

The next section moves from the Pharisees to a different group with similar sins:

## **II. When You Are Responsible for Leading People Astray (11:45-54)**

*<sup>45</sup> One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also." <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. <sup>52</sup> 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." <sup>53</sup> 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, <sup>54</sup> lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.*

As I've said before, when you see a man that Luke calls a "lawyer," don't think of lawyers today, think experts in God's law. They were also called scribes. It was very astute of this man to realize that Jesus' harsh words for the Pharisees applied to him and his group too. And just in case implying they were guilty too wasn't enough, Jesus then unloaded on them! Putting verses 46 and 52 together, Jesus was irked that not only were the scribes not understanding the true way of salvation and being unwilling to do what it takes to honor God, but they are keeping everyone else from following God as well! They're loading them with burdensome work that does them no good, and that the scribes themselves are unwilling to do. One commentator I read equated the scribes to IRS agents who love to make very complicated laws and rules for everyone else to keep, but they themselves don't pay their taxes because they know all the loopholes to get out of paying.<sup>2</sup> This was some serious "Do as I say not as I do" hypocrisy. Every spiritual teacher should heed this reminder that we can't tell others to live in ways that we're not willing to live ourselves. One of the things that I remember most about my youth pastor, Dan Burns, is that he challenged the teens in his youth group to memorize Scripture, learn how to share our faith, all these hard thing. But I knew that he could recite the book of Philippians if I asked him to, and that he was sharing his faith all the time. Unlike these scribes, he carried whatever burden he asked of us first.

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 1* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), p. 634.

These scribes/lawyers that Jesus addressed were in the middle of building large tombs for the prophets. They were doing it as a way to honor those prophets, or so they wanted people to think. But Jesus turned it around on them and essentially said that it's ironic that you're building them tombs because you're the spiritual heirs of the ones who killed them. Verse 51 mentions the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, which is essentially saying "you killed the prophets from A to Z." It's both an alphabetical list as well as a chronological list, since Abel was the first one killed by Cain in Genesis 4, and Zechariah is the last recorded prophet killed in 2 Chronicles 24. Jesus is saying that from the first murder to the last, their blood is on your hands. Not only that, but it seems that Jesus is saying this pattern of killing God's prophets will continue. (Hold that thought)

Let's wrap up Jesus' criticisms with words of warning that He spoke to the disciples:

### **III. When Your Lies and Secrets Come to Light (12:1-3)**

*<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. <sup>2</sup> Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops."*

It's interesting that verse 1 says the crowds were tripping over themselves, it was a massive group come to hear Jesus. Jesus could have told His disciples, "Hey, we've got the huge crowds, let's make sure we give them what they want." No, He took the opportunity to pull them aside and say, "Don't be hypocrites like the Pharisees. Every private thing you say or do will be made known." In other words, if you're going to be leaders, make sure your heart is right. Why did Jesus call the hypocrisy of the Pharisees "leaven"? Because leaven spreads through a whole batch of dough. That's what poor leadership, especially poor spiritual leadership, does – it infects all of the followers.

The leaven of the Pharisees is inward and secret, for a time. But Jesus promised that all would be revealed. The ironic thing about getting away with things in this life is that you know you won't ultimately get away with it. There will be a day of reckoning. Your hidden sins, your hypocrisy will be exposed sooner or later, you cannot hide it forever. "Your sins will find you out" is another way to say it, if not in this life, then on the day of judgment. The Pharisees thought they had it all figured out, the best of both worlds – esteemed in the eyes of men and since they were the leaders of the synagogues, clearly God's favorite people too. But God knew the greed, hypocrisy, and wickedness in their hearts, and Jesus exposed it. May we learn from their failures. How much better to repent and work on honoring God in our hearts, not caring how "holy" we look on the outside.

### **Conclusion**

A rather strict, self-righteous Sunday School teacher was trying to make the point that good Christians don't keep their faith a secret. With her head held high and her arms crossed, the teacher asked, 'Now, class, why do you think people call me a Christian?' The room was silent for a moment. Then one of the boys slowly raised his hand and said, 'Probably because they don't know you.'<sup>3</sup> If people really knew us, really knew our hearts, would they see some level of consistency, or would they see hypocrisy? And the answer is, we're all hypocrites, we all fall short of following Jesus perfectly. And trying to pretend we're not just aggravates the problem. But it honors God to look at our lives and try to reconcile our walk and our talk.

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Rice, *Hot Illustration for Youth Talks 4* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 107

Some signs that you might be slipping into being a Pharisee:

- 1) When working on your own piety is more important than helping other people
- 2) When pride has made you into someone who speaks but does not listen, who's not teachable
- 3) When you are quick to criticize but slow to help
- 4) When you think God is pleased with you and mad at everyone else
- 5) When your view of grace is that you earn it by doing lots of good things

Now, the first thing we need to do is stop trying to obey the rules, right? That's what the Pharisees were, a bunch of law-keepers. But not so fast. What do we do with Bible passages like Psalm 119:4-5, 7 – *"You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!... I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules"*? What about Jesus saying plainly, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15)? You see it's not legalistic and wrong to keep God's law. Legalism is when we make up our own laws and expect everyone else to keep them too. If you don't pray for at least 15 minutes every morning like I do, you're grieving the heart of God. I honor God by not watching PG-13 or R rated movies and that should be your standard too. I honor God by abstaining from alcohol and I expect you to as well. You are sinning if you don't school your child the same way that I do. You have all kinds of opinions about what other Christians ought to wear, how they should parenting, how they should spend their money, their ministry priorities – and you expect others to agree with you because you believe your ways are the best ways to honor God.

And if you're a true Pharisee, you are actually simultaneously neglecting the things that God calls you to: living life sacrificially, considering others better than yourself, embracing humility, losing your life for His sake, caring for widows, orphans, and the poor, being quick to repent of your own sins and even quicker to forgive others. A modern-day Pharisee has the double-whammy of obscuring the true Gospel with their false rules as well as failing to live out a Christ-like life. Unbelievers and those who are not strong in their faith look at that and most of the time say, "No thanks."

Thankfully, after all of Jesus' criticisms of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, they all decided to follow His advice, get their hearts right with God, commit to truly loving others so that the most number of people could come into God's kingdom. Right? Isn't that how the rest of the Gospels play out? Oh right, that's not what they did. The last two verses of chapter 11 even tell us that they were *"lying in wait for him,"* that they had turned all their attention to killing Him. Later, they pulled one of His closest men, Judas, aside and offered him money to find a time and place where they could arrest Him in secret. Then they pressured the Roman authorities to pronounce a death sentence, even when the governor found no reason to condemn Him. They turned the people against Him and taunted Him all the way until He was nailed to a cross. And they celebrated killing one more of God's prophets. They thought that they could protect their nation by sacrificing this one Man. And in a way, they did. God used His death in a way that none of the Pharisees or scribes could have predicted – as a way to pay the penalty of death and judgment for His people.

Ligon Duncan helped me understand the fundamental problem of the Pharisees: at the root of everything, they misunderstood the human predicament which is the reality of indwelling sin. They thought they could deal with sin with superficial answers. If you're sinful inside, just pretend that you're not. If you're dirty inside, just cover it up with rituals and external things that make you look clean. If you struggle with sinful urges, just gain a reputation for being holy.<sup>4</sup> But when we pretend

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<sup>4</sup> Ligon Duncan's sermon "The Marks of a Pharisee (and the Remedy)" on July 18, 2010, found at [fpcjackson.org](http://fpcjackson.org).

and cover the outside without dealing with the inside, does that solve our sin problem? No, of course not. We need something a lot deeper. We need transformation. Which only comes from Jesus. We can't clean ourselves from the outside in, it must be from the inside out. But by nature, our hearts are turned away from God, they are spiritually dead. When Jesus comes into our lives, the Holy Spirit changes our old, dead hearts of stone into new hearts of flesh that beat in time with God's truth. We live to please the Lord and our actions are rooted in hearts that love God. We can still be hypocritical, but the Spirit guides us in all truth and we are open to His correction. Amen.

#### Benediction

1 John 5:20-21 – *“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”*