

What Would Jesus Undo?

Hypocrisy

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TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Titus 1:15-16

Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted. Such people claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good. (NLT)

Matthew 23:25-28

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence! You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish, and then the outside will become clean, too. "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.'(NLT)

Psalms 139:23

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.' (NLT)

Romans 8:1-6

'So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. '(NLT)

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Who are some of the least hypocritical people you know? What stands out about them?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- The definition of a hypocrite is a person who pretends to have certain beliefs, attitudes or feelings when they really do not. Describe how you feel or what you think about when you hear the word "hypocrisy".
- Read Matthew 23:25-28. What was Jesus saying to the Pharisees? Have you ever been affected by hypocrisy? How did it impact you? Your belief in God?
- Read Proverbs 28:13. Why do you think confession leads to mercy?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Describe what "masks" you wore growing up or are wearing now.
- In what area of your life do you struggle to show your honest self?
- Think about environments, participants, reputation. How do they factor into your behavior? Are any 'masks' involved? How do you know?
- Accountability is a great safeguard for identifying and combating hypocrisy. What other safeguards can you establish that can help to keep you on track?
- How will you ask your Small Group, other friends, or family to pray for you this week?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Take a step:
 - Tell your group about a mask you've been wearing. Then, ask them to help you watch for it - and keep it off.
 - Do inventory this week as you interact with people. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you other masks that you put on.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- God, we have nothing to fear when we have nothing to hide. We can't surprise You with our honesty and confession. Will You give us the boldness to live open lives? Thank You, Jesus, for your unlimited grace. Amen!

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "What does the Bible say about hypocrisy?"

Answer: In essence, “hypocrisy” refers to the act of claiming to believe something but acting in a different manner. The word is derived from the Greek term for “actor”—literally, “one who wears a mask”—in other words, someone who pretends to be what he is not.

The Bible calls hypocrisy a sin. There are two forms hypocrisy can take: that of professing belief in something and then acting in a manner contrary to that belief, and that of looking down on others when we ourselves are flawed.

The prophet Isaiah condemned the hypocrisy of his day: “The Lord says, ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’” (Isaiah 29:13). Centuries later, Jesus quoted this verse, aiming the same condemnation at the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 15:8-9). John the Baptist refused to give hypocrites a pass, telling them to produce “fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). Jesus took an equally staunch stand against sanctimony—He called hypocrites “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15), “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27), “snakes,” and “brood of vipers” (Matthew 23:33).

We cannot say we love God if we do not love our brothers (1 John 2:9). Love must be “without hypocrisy” (Romans 12:9, NKJV). A hypocrite may look righteous on the outside, but it is a façade. True righteousness comes from the inner transformation of the Holy Spirit not an external conformity to a set of rules (Matthew 23:5; 2 Corinthians 3:8).

Jesus addressed the other form of hypocrisy in the Sermon on the Mount: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5). Jesus is not teaching against discernment or helping others overcome sin; instead, He is telling us not be so prideful and convinced of our own goodness that we criticize others from a position of self-righteousness. We should do some introspection first and correct our own shortcomings before we go after the “specks” in others (cf. Romans 2:1).

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He had many run-ins with the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees. These men were well versed in the Scriptures and zealous about following every letter of the Law (Acts 26:5). However, in adhering to the letter of the Law, they actively sought loopholes that allowed them to violate the spirit of the Law. Also, they displayed a lack of compassion toward their fellow man and were often overly demonstrative of their so-called spirituality in order to garner praise (Matthew 23:5-7; Luke 18:11). Jesus denounced their behavior in no uncertain terms, pointing out that “justice, mercy, and faithfulness” are more important than pursuing a perfection based on faulty standards (Matthew 23:23). Jesus made it clear that the problem was not with the Law but the way in which the Pharisees implemented it (Matthew 23:2-3). Today, the word pharisee has become synonymous with hypocrite.

It must be noted that hypocrisy is not the same as taking a stand against sin. For example, it is not hypocrisy to teach that drunkenness is a sin, unless the one teaching against drunkenness gets drunk every weekend—that would be hypocrisy.

As children of God, we are called to strive for holiness (1 Peter 1:16). We are to “hate what is evil” and “cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9). We should never imply an acceptance of sin, especially in our own lives. All we do should be consistent with what we believe and who we are in Christ. Play-acting is meant for the stage, not for real life.