

Jesus Confronts Hypocrisy

Devotional Reading: [1 Samuel 15:19–23](#)

Background Scripture: [Luke 11:37–44](#)

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³⁷ When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. ³⁸ But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

³⁹ Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

⁴² “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

⁴³ “Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

⁴⁴ “Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”



Key Text

*The Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.—***Luke 11:39**

God’s Law Is Love

Unit 1: Love Completes, Law Falls Short

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the woes Jesus proclaimed.
2. Explain why the Pharisees were hypocrites.
3. Identify a common area of hypocrisy among Christians and suggest ways to avoid it.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Counterfeit Money, Counterfeit Behavior
- B. Lesson Context

I. Two People (Luke 11:37–41)

- A. Jesus and a Pharisee (vv. 37–38)
- B. Inside and Outside (vv. 39–40)
Beautiful Teeth

- C. Generosity and Cleanliness (v. 41)

II. Three Woes (Luke 11:42–44)

- A. Against Injustice (v. 42)
- B. Against Pride (v. 43)
- C. Against Deadly Influence (v. 44)
Hypocritical Behavior

Conclusion

- A. Pure Religion
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

czar zahr.

Deuteronomy Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

Leviticus Leh-vit-ih-kus.

Pharisees Fair-ih-seez.

synagogues sin-uh-gogs.

Torah (*Hebrew*) Tor-uh.

Introduction

A. Counterfeit Money, Counterfeit Behavior

After the creation of modern money, an inevitable invention followed: counterfeit money. For example, ancient counterfeiters minted coins made from metals that were less valuable than the authentic coins. The counterfeit coins were dipped in silver to mimic the real coins. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, fraudsters clipped the edges of authentic coins in order to extract bits of the precious metals. From those clippings, they would create a counterfeit coin.

Contemporary money has undergone developments to limit counterfeiters. Many modern coins have grooved or milled edges to show that none of the valuable precious metals have been removed. These efforts, while preventing some counterfeiters, have not done away with the practice altogether. Profits await the successful counterfeiter.

People sometimes “counterfeit” themselves by pretending to be someone they are not. Scandals arise when people say they believe or value one thing but act in a way that opposes that value. Jesus had no tolerance for hypocritical behavior, especially from the religious leaders of his day.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Luke is the first of a two-volume work attributed to “Luke, the doctor” ([Colossians 4:14](#)). The man Luke was likely the same individual mentioned as the traveling companion of the apostle Paul ([2 Timothy 4:11](#)). This would explain the use of “we” throughout the book of Acts (examples: [Acts 16:10–12](#); [20:5–6](#); [21:1](#)), which is the second volume of Luke’s writing ([1:1–3](#)). Together, the books of Luke and Acts describe the establishment and expansion of the first-century church.

Today’s Scripture is part of a larger section that details Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem ([Luke 9:51–19:44](#)). Immediately prior to the events of this lesson’s Scripture, Jesus had been teaching ([11:1–4](#)) and healing ([11:14–15](#)). His teaching called out the wickedness of the people ([11:29–32](#)) and emphasized the importance of their internal spiritual transformation ([11:33–36](#)).

The religious leaders undoubtedly heard what Jesus was teaching and doing as he traveled to Jerusalem. The New Testament Gospels describe Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees more than any other party of first-century Judaism. The Pharisees were a small but influential sect. Their focus was

on strict adherence to Judaism (see [Acts 26:5](#)), which would have involved obedience to the Law of Moses (also called Torah), the first five books of the Old Testament. The Pharisees believed that by faithfully obeying even the smallest parts of the law, they would experience blessing from God. In an effort to follow the law faithfully, the Pharisees had established a tradition to guide their behavior (see [Mark 7:3–5](#)). The Pharisees sought to “build a fence” around the Law of Moses by enforcing this tradition and their own rules. The expectation was that by following the Pharisees’ tradition, a person would faithfully keep God’s commands—even down to the most obscure command.

The Pharisees’ zeal, however, had caused them to lose sight of the intentions of the law and the extent to which they had been influenced by tradition. They had focused so heavily on their prideful adherence to tradition that they neglected to cultivate hearts of worship that the law required (see [Matthew 15:1–9](#)). Jesus denounced the Pharisees for their pride and hypocrisy (examples: [23:1–7](#); [Luke 18:9–14](#)). As a result, instances of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees arose (examples: [6:1–11](#); [16:13–14](#); [John 7:28–34](#); [11:57](#)).

Despite the hostile relationship, Jesus accepted invitations to eat with the Pharisees. Today’s Scripture describes the second time in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus dined with a Pharisee (see also [Luke 7:36–50](#); [14:1–6](#)). Accounts similar to those found in today’s lesson are found in [Matthew 15:1–20](#); [23:5–7](#), [23–28](#); and [Mark 12:38–39](#).

I. Two People ([Luke 11:37–41](#))

A. Jesus and a Pharisee (vv. [37–38](#))

37. When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table.

Prior to this verse, *Jesus* had been teaching the crowds regarding wickedness and judgment ([Luke 11:29–32](#)) and how they might live in a manner indicative of spiritual health ([11:33–36](#)). The text is silent regarding the reason that this certain *Pharisee* invited Jesus to eat with him. Inviting a teacher to a meal was common in the first century AD. The meal allowed the teacher to demonstrate his or her expertise and wisdom. By extending the invitation, the host desired to receive some level of honor from the guest and from the wider community of people. Extending invitations to the socially out-cast, people like “tax collectors and sinners,” was generally avoided (see [5:27–31](#)). Perhaps this Pharisee wanted to question Jesus in private. Or perhaps he wanted to demonstrate his own piety by way of extending an invitation to the traveling teacher.

What Do You Think?

How can your sharing a meal with another person give you the opportunity to show God’s love to that person?

Digging Deeper

Who will you invite to share a meal with you this upcoming week?

38. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

It was common for first-century Jews to perform ceremonial washings for purification (examples: [John 2:6](#); [3:25](#); [11:55](#)). Such occurrences were a way for the people to become ritually clean as described by the Law of Moses ([Leviticus 11–15](#)). For Pharisees, cleanliness in general and handwashing in particular were ways to follow the religious tradition (see [Mark 7:1–4](#)). Although the Law of Moses required periodic washing (examples: [Leviticus 11:28](#); [15:4–27](#)), the Pharisees had broadened the practice.

IS THE INSIDE AS CLEAN AS THE OUTSIDE APPEARS?



Visual for [Lesson 1](#). Start a discussion by pointing to this posted visual and asking, “What’s the connection between integrity and spiritual cleanliness?”

One would expect that a guest would follow the customs and manners of his or her host. Being *surprised*, astonished, or amazed at someone did not always have positive connotations, as was the case with Jesus ([Mark 6:6](#)) and the apostle Paul ([Galatians 1:6](#)). This Pharisee did not have positive regard for that fact that Jesus *did not first wash*.

Jesus did not object to washing. He washed the feet of the Twelve ([John 13:1–12](#)). He even scolded a

host for failing to provide water for washing (Luke 7:44). In this instance, Jesus' refusal to wash served as an act of provocation and gave him the opportunity to teach those in attendance at the meal.

B. Inside and Outside (vv. 39–40)

39. Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

Washing only *the outside of the cup and dish* presents an obvious problem. While the vessels might appear clean, the inside that touches food or drink will remain unclean. The dish still has potential for contamination. Cleaning dishes for food and drink requires total commitment!

Jesus was not primarily concerned about food safety practices. Instead, he used the example to rebuke the attitudes and behaviors of the *Pharisees*. They were more concerned with outward displays of purity than with the actual purity of their hearts and minds. The Pharisees' inner impurity was evident in their public actions. *Wickedness* is a generic term for evil actions. The apostle Paul used the same term when describing the actions of the unrighteous (Romans 1:28–31). Such actions are indicative of the evil present in a person's heart (see Mark 7:20–23). *Greed* characterized the desires of many of the Pharisees (Luke 16:14). They engaged in predatory behavior to gain wealth at the expense of vulnerable members of their community (see 11:41, below; 20:46–47).

Beautiful Teeth

Samuel Collins (1619–1670) entered the sumptuous Russian palace, eager to attend his first royal ball. A physician, Collins had been appointed as the personal physician to the Russian czar. As the festivities began, the czar introduced Collins to a group of noblewomen. Samuel greeted the women in broken Russian. The group broke out in laughter and smiles, revealing their teeth that were various shades of black! Soon after, Collins realized that every woman at the ball had inexplicably dyed her teeth this unsettling shade.

Because of poor dental hygiene habits, tooth decay was prevalent during this time. These women had blackened their teeth so that others could not differentiate rotten teeth from healthy teeth. All teeth were the same unnatural color. By doing so, the women preserved a facade of health and beauty.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day had focused on creating a mere facade of righteousness and ritual cleanliness. However, Jesus saw through their display. While the veneer of righteousness might have fooled people, Jesus knew the wickedness of the hearts of the Pharisees. What parts of your life are you “painting over” in order to impress others? Get comfortable being real with the Lord, for he knows the true status of your heart.

—A. W.

40. “You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?”

Calling the Pharisees *foolish* intensified Jesus' indictment of their wicked behavior. In a later parable, Jesus used the designation “fool” when describing “a certain rich man” and the spiritual dangers he faced because of his greed (Luke 12:13–21). Both the Pharisees and that parable's main character

were fools because their lives lacked integrity.

Jesus' rhetorical question highlights that God *made* the whole person: the *outside* parts which are seen and the *inside* parts which are unseen. God himself is perfect ([Matthew 5:48](#)) and pure ([Job 4:17](#); compare [Habakkuk 1:13](#)). Therefore, God desires total purity from his creation. God wants people to live lives that are pure from the inside out, not concerned only with appearances (see [James 4:8](#)). Jesus explained the folly of shallow cleanliness in place of developing actual spiritual purity and lives of integrity.

What Do You Think?

What steps can believers take to develop spiritual purity and personal integrity?

Digging Deeper

How do [Romans 12](#); [Ephesians 4:20–32](#); and [Colossians 3:5–17](#) inform your actions in this regard?

C. Generosity and Cleanliness (v. 41)

41. “But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

One correction for the Pharisees' greed and wickedness involved giving generously of their wealth. This could be accomplished through charitable gifts given to the poor. Although the Law of Moses contains no reference to these specific gifts, it does include guidance on caring for people in need ([Exodus 23:10–11](#); [Leviticus 25:35–43](#); [Deuteronomy 15:7–11](#); etc.). Therefore, practices of justice in the form of generosity were not a new requirement for the Pharisees. Jesus was calling them to follow the law that they already had claimed to value.

Jesus' command appears to deny the value of one practice (washing) in order to uphold the value of another (giving). However, it is the intent, rather than the act itself, that determines the purity of that act. How a person allocates his or her wealth is one way to indicate the status of his or her heart: a *clean* heart is *generous* with worldly wealth (see [1 John 3:17–18](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you practice generosity that comes from having a clean heart?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to overcome challenges to demonstrating hospitality?

II. Three Woes

([Luke 11:42–44](#))

A. Against Injustice (v. 42)

42a. “Woe to you Pharisees,

A *woe* is a proclamation intended to announce pending pain, threat, or grief. Such proclamations

are common in the Old Testament prophets (examples: [Isaiah 5:8–30](#); [Micah 2:1–2](#)). Jesus also proclaimed such warnings (examples: [Matthew 11:21](#); [26:24](#); [Luke 6:24–26](#); [17:1](#)). On one occasion, Jesus proclaimed woes upon the teachers of the law and the *Pharisees* ([Matthew 23:13–32](#)).

42b. “because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs,

The first woe came as a result of the Pharisees’ keeping a minor command without showing regard for a weightier command (see [Luke 11:42c](#), below). A tithe is a gift of *a tenth* from the larger whole (example: [Genesis 14:18–20](#)). The Law of Moses provided guidelines on how the Israelites should give a tenth of their goods for worship and to support the Levites and people who were impoverished ([Leviticus 27:30–33](#); [Deuteronomy 14:22–29](#); [26:1–15](#)).

Herbs like *mint* and *rue* can grow wild and can flourish without oversight and care from humans. Determining the appropriate amount of these herbs to tithe would have required great attention to detail from the Pharisees. Several centuries after events of this lesson, extra-biblical commentary on the Law of Moses clarified that tithing from these herbs was not required because such plants were difficult to measure and considered insignificant. While the Law of Moses gave no specific command regarding the tithing of wild herbs, the Pharisees practiced such a thing. Their practice hedged all around the law while disregarding the explicit requirements of the law.

Tithing should have been a joyous act of love to God. The Pharisees had turned the practice into an opportunity to demonstrate their rigorous obedience to the law, even regarding insignificant herbs.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you tithe to God from your time, energy, or thoughts?

Digging Deeper

How will these types of tithes demonstrate your love for God and for your neighbors?

42c. “but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

The same God who acted with justice and mercy toward his people by rescuing them from Egypt (see [Exodus 12:31–42](#)) also required that his people show *justice* and mercy to others in need (see [Zechariah 7:9–10](#)). The Old Testament provides guidance regarding treatment toward people experiencing poverty, many of whom were widows, orphans, and resident aliens (examples: [Exodus 22:21–27](#); [Deuteronomy 24:10–22](#)). God judged people who failed to show fair and just treatment toward others (see [Amos 2:6–8](#)).

At the heart of the Law of Moses and Jesus’ teachings were the dual commands regarding the people’s *love of God* ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [Matthew 22:36–38](#)) and their love for others ([Leviticus 19:18](#); [Matthew 22:39](#); [Luke 10:26–27](#)). God’s people followed the former command as they demonstrated their willingness to adhere to the latter command.

Jesus declared woe on the Pharisees for their neglect of these two commands. They had *practiced* the unrequired smaller aspects of law—tithing herbs—while leaving *undone* the command to love others (see [Matthew 23:23](#)). They had attempted to honor God while also neglecting the command to show justice to their neighbors. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had shown a lack of regard for peo-

ple in need (see [Luke 20:46–47](#)). Further, they had acted proudly regarding their observance of the law (see [18:9–14](#)), leading them to show disregard for others (see [Matthew 23:1–4](#)). They had failed to live in the manner required of them: a life of humility marked with mercy and justice (see [Micah 6:8](#)).

B. Against Pride (v. 43)

43. “Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

The second *woe* calls out the prideful and arrogant behavior of the Pharisees. Their *love* was misdirected, concerned for their own status rather than the well-being of others.

First-century *synagogues* were the locations for the reading and teaching of Scripture (example: [Matthew 4:23](#)). Most synagogues would have lacked sufficient seating, requiring some people to stand or sit on the floor. The religious leaders, however, would not have to take on these positions. They would sit in *the most important seats* of honor and prestige, likely visible to all people in the building.

The Pharisees’ desire for recognition also included their attitudes in the public square. Jesus warned against similar actions from the teachers of the law as they “like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect *in the marketplaces*” ([Luke 20:46](#)). The nature of these *greetings* is unknown, but they likely involved excessive deference by other people to these leaders. God desires that his people act with humility and treat others with respect and dignity, regardless of social status (see [Romans 12:3](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can believers ensure worship services do not turn into opportunities for self-promotion?

Digging Deeper

What steps can your congregation take to avoid playing favorites?

C. Against Deadly Influence (v. 44)

44. “Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”

This final *woe* does not mention a specific sin committed by the Pharisees. Instead, the *woe* introduces a metaphor that demonstrates Jesus’ disgust. In an ironic twist, Jesus proclaimed that the Pharisees—people most concerned with purity—had become not only defiled but also a source of defilement themselves. Jesus considered them hypocrites because they claimed to honor the law while ignoring its core: loving God and others (see commentary on [Luke 11:42c](#), above).

If a Jewish person came into contact with a dead body, the person became ritually unclean and would have to take steps to be considered clean (see [Numbers 19:11–22](#)). This held true even if a grave was unmarked and the person who came upon it did not realize their proximity to the dead. In a similar manner, people would unknowingly become unclean when they followed the teachings and the

practices of the Pharisees. This was like people walking over *unmarked graves* and not being aware of their own defilement. The behavior and attitudes of the Pharisees were causing others to suffer grave harm.

Hypocritical Behavior

Born into slavery, Harriet Jacobs (approx. 1813–1897) understood firsthand the horror of being controlled by other people. She suffered inhumane conditions as a slave, assault at the hands of slaveholders, and loneliness as a result of her family being torn apart. She eventually escaped to New York City and became a staunch abolitionist. She detailed her experiences in her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

In the book, Harriet questioned the religious leaders of her day. Regarding their attitudes toward slavery, she wondered if such leaders were “blind or ... hypocrites?” She called out the duplicity of Christian leaders who either ignored slavery or used Scripture to justify the practice.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day had acted hypocritically; they had disregarded the parts of the Law of Moses that required demonstrations of care to the most vulnerable members of the community. Although the Pharisees’ public displays of observance to the law portrayed one thing, in their hearts was the opposite sentiment. They had failed to show mercy and justice. They had become prideful. They were a deadly influence on others. Hypocrisy is still an issue today. Where do hypocritical impulses arise in your heart?

—A. W.

Conclusion

A. Pure Religion

In many ways, faults similar to those Jesus pointed out in the Pharisees can be found in people today. The Pharisees prioritized outward displays of holiness, while failing to do the important work of love, mercy, and justice. Pursuing counterfeit displays of holiness, while potentially easier than going after what God requires, leaves people as hypocrites. God wants his people to experience holiness in all aspects of their lives.

Followers of Jesus must remember to honor the commands to love God, show justice, and demonstrate merciful love, above any other traditions. Only then will believers exercise a “pure” religion before God ([James 1:27](#)). A failure to do so indicates that one’s heart has not been transformed.

Consider the following questions: Does your behavior lead you to love God more deeply? Does your behavior lead you to act justly or advocate for justice for others? If you can answer positively to both questions, then you are on the right track to loving God and your neighbor.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we desire to be holy people. Take away our need to impress others, and impress

on us the image of your Son, Jesus Christ. Show us how we might be generous with our giftings in order that we might love you and our neighbors. In the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen

C. Thought to Remember

Pure religion requires that we love God and our neighbors.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 12) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. Order ISBN 978-0-784739-13-6 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, do an online search for a recording of the 1964 song “The ‘In’ Crowd” by Dobie Gray. Once class begins, divide the class in half and give each half one of the following assignments. Ask one half to listen to the lyrics and answer the following question: “How does the singer know if he is a part of the perceived ‘in’ crowd?” Ask the other half to listen to the lyrics and answer the following question: “According to the singer, what is great about being in the ‘in’ crowd?” (*Option.* Print the lyrics or project the lyrics on a screen.) After five minutes, ask groups to present their answers for whole-class discussion.

Have groups discuss the following questions: 1—What are some common situations when people claim to be a part of the perceived “in” crowd? 2—How might it feel to be a part of situations where you were considered to be “in” and others were considered to be “out”? 3—How might it feel to be part of the perceived “out” crowd?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Movie Script” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated. After 10 minutes, reconvene the groups and ask them to share their results.

Transition to Bible study by saying, “Today’s Scripture describes how Jesus interacted with some religious leaders who were proud of their status as a part of the perceived ‘in’ crowd. As we study, notice Jesus’ reaction to their attitude.”

Into the Word

Before class, recruit two learners to prepare a brief presentation regarding the lesson context.

Assign one of the following questions to each learner for them to answer: 1—Why was it considered problematic that Jesus refused to wash his hands? 2—Why was it shocking for Jesus to compare the Pharisees to graves? Invite the learners to share their reports before the whole class.

Ask a volunteer to read [Luke 11:37–44](#) aloud. Write two headers on the board: *What Jesus Condemned* / *What Jesus Encouraged*. Divide the class into two groups. One group will come up with responses to the first header, while the other group will do the same for the second header.

After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to give his or her group's responses. Write the responses under the appropriate header on the board. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What attitudes of the Pharisees were at the heart of Jesus' condemnation? 2—How could the actions that Jesus encouraged be an antidote to these negative attitudes?

Into Life

Place learners into groups of three and distribute a sheet of paper and pen to each group. Have groups discuss the following questions and write down their responses: 1—How could the Pharisees correct the hypocrisy for which Jesus criticized them? 2—How have Christians displayed or have continued to display hypocrisy? 3—How can Christians avoid hypocritical behavior?

Option 1. Distribute copies of the “We Still Have a Problem” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it in pairs before discussing conclusions with the whole class.

Option 2. Ask groups to imagine a visitor to your congregation. List possible reactions that the visitor could have to the visit. Consider questions that the visitor might have regarding expected behavior or the order of service. After two minutes, ask groups to share the lists with the class. Discuss how your congregation may be inconsistent regarding intended attitudes toward visitors and actual behavior toward visitors.

Close class with prayer. Begin with a silent time of repentance for hypocritical attitudes. Finish by asking God to reveal to learners how to live in a consistent way that demonstrates God's love.