

SESSION 4

CALLING OUT SIN

Leader pages on pp. 114-117

THE POINT:

AS WE CALL OUT SIN
FOR WHAT IT IS, WE CAN
POINT OTHERS TO GOD.

LUKE 11:37-46; 12:1-3

MEMORY VERSE

³⁷ As he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So, he went in and reclined at the table.

³⁸ When the Pharisee saw this, he was amazed that he did not first perform the ritual washing before dinner.

³⁹ But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and evil.

⁴⁰ Fools! Didn't he who made the outside make the inside too?

⁴¹ **But give from what is within to the poor, and then everything is clean for you.**

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⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! You give a tenth of mint, rue, and every kind of herb, and you bypass justice and love for God. These things you should have done without neglecting the others.

⁴³ "Woe to you Pharisees! You love the front seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

⁴⁴ "Woe to you! You are like unmarked graves; the people who walk over them don't know it."

⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things you insult us too."

⁴⁶ Then he said, "Woe also to you experts in the law! You load people with burdens that are hard to carry, and yet you yourselves don't touch these burdens with one of your fingers.

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¹ Meanwhile, a crowd of many thousands came together, so that they were trampling on one another. He began to say to his disciples first, "Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

² There is nothing covered that won't be uncovered, nothing hidden that won't be made known.

³ Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in an ear in private rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

KEYWORDS

Ritual Washing (v. 38)—The Pharisees devised an elaborate system of washings, a ceremonial attempt to achieve holiness, that included washing before meals.

Fools (v. 40)— Old Testament term for those who are blind to God or deny His existence.

Woe (vv. 42-44)— An expression of grief, condemnation, or lament. Jesus used this term to denounces the Pharisees and the scribes.

Leaven...Pharisees (v.1)— The symbol of leaven stood for anything that could corrupt. Here, the influence of the hypocritical religious leaders.

WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS BE AWARE OF AS WE CALL OUT SIN IN THE WORLD?

If you've spent any time on social media, you've likely seen a video of some influencer showing how to use a product that he or she claims will change your life. You may or may not have even heard of the product before the video, but its purpose was to get you to see the need for the product being advertised. If the influencer is really good, he or she will get you to think that you will miss out if you don't get your hands on what's being offered.

Believers need to connect with others in the same way that social media influencers do with viewers of their videos. We should have a similar mindset, but the difference is that we're not trying to sell a product that may or may not work. When we call out sin, we do so knowing that God can change lives, because He changed ours! In our encounters with those knowingly or unknowingly in sin, we must point out the sin but also point to the One who can forgive and remove sin.

Call Out Hypocrisy // Luke 11:37-41

A unique feature in today's session is the way Jesus pointed out the sins of the Pharisee but also pointed the Pharisee to God. Jesus modeled for

us the right way to relate to those who are far from God, but we must note some differences between us and Jesus.

Without careful consideration of these differences, we can come across as condemning and critical. Let's remember:

- *We aren't omniscient like Jesus.* He knew everything about the Pharisee. Our observations of others can't tell the full story of a person's spiritual condition, so we must approach them carefully, asking more questions than making statements.
- *We're sinners, too.* The honest admission of our own failures can go a long way in finding a receptive audience when pointing out sin.
- *We are not the Holy Spirit.* We can name the sin and point to Jesus, but only the Holy Spirit brings conviction—if He doesn't, our pressure won't persuade.

We must keep these things in mind, not to relieve ourselves of our responsibility to share Christ, but to make sure we share Christ in a way that enables people to respond authentically in faith.



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To better understand this passage, some background is helpful. In Jesus's time, the Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council, made up of two main groups: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Although the Pharisees were the minority, they were influential. The Sadducees strictly followed the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—while the Pharisees also upheld a body of oral laws, which they applied to nearly every part of daily life. As Luke begins his account of the conflict, it centers on one of these oral laws that Jesus was accused of breaking.

When a Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, Jesus accepted and reclined at the table, without the ritual washing required by the oral law. This disregard for the oral law amazed the Pharisee, but Jesus offered no apology. In fact, Jesus used it as an opportunity to point out the Pharisee's sin.

Using the word pictures of a cup and dish, Jesus spoke plainly about the Pharisee's hypocrisy. No one would clean only the outside of a cup or dish and declare it clean. Not only should the inside be cleaned, but the inside should be the priority. As it is with a cup and a dish, so it is with people. His logic was simple but irrefutable: "Fools! Didn't he who made the outside make the inside too?" (v. 40). In other words, shouldn't the condition of the heart be our first priority in our relationship with God? Of course it should.

Jesus spoke plainly about the Pharisee's sin, yet He didn't stop there and leave the Pharisee condemned. Jesus compassionately pointed to the solution for his sin: "But give from what is within to the poor, and then everything is clean for you" (v. 41). Giving alms to the poor was an honorable thing to do, but it could also be motivated by the desire to promote the outward appearance of piety. Jesus commanded the Pharisee to give from the heart—a heart that was supposed to be right with God. When the heart is right with God, it can make "everything" clean, the inside and the outside. Jesus's point is clear: It's what's on the inside that matters most.

HOW CAN WE SHIFT OUR FOCUS FROM EXTERNAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICE TO INTERNAL RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Call Out Sin Without Playing Favorites

// Luke 11:42-46

The inevitable outcome of practicing legalism is hypocrisy, for no one can fulfill all of the law perfectly all the time. Consequently, it's not the hypocrisy of the Pharisees that should surprise and alarm us. What should surprise and alarm us are the choices the Pharisees made in their effort to obey the written and oral laws. They emphasized obedience to the lightweight issues



DIGGING DEEPER JUSTICE FOR ALL

The Pledge of Allegiance concludes with the words "liberty and justice for all." They serve as a reminder of the ideals to which the United States is supposed to strive. As we know, the nation has often struggled to reach these ideals. This is not a concern unique to America, however. In the Old Testament, God made His concern about justice being done in Israel very clear. The Torah commanded the Israelites not to mistreat foreigners since the Israelites themselves had been foreigners in Egypt (Ex. 22:21). Provisions were also made for the poor and marginalized (Deut. 24:19). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not always share God's concern about justice, so God used numerous prophets to remind them of their responsibility to care for the disadvantaged. Prophets like Isaiah, Amos, and Micah highlighted the need for justice among God's people. Jesus built on this foundation during the years of His ministry.

How could biblical notions of justice provide support for justice advocacy today?

and disregarded obedience to the weightier ones. Jesus spoke plainly about the Pharisees' hypocrisy. They focused on external practice over internal transformation.

As religious leaders, the Pharisees bore the responsibility of guiding God's people to be faithful to the covenant God established with them. Two big aspects of that covenant are love for God and justice. Generally speaking, the Ten Commandments could be divided into two categories: our relationship with God (love for God) and our relationship with others (justice). By their example, they taught that religious practice was more important than a proper relationship with God and others. By neglecting justice and love for God, the Pharisees led people away from God.

Why would the Pharisees choose to emphasize religious practice instead of ministering to God's people? Jesus pointed to the reason when He said to them, "You love the front seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces" (v. 43). There it is. The reason was pride. The Pharisees loved themselves more than God's people. Their pride caused them to turn their service inwardly in order to benefit themselves instead of others.

Jesus's accusations caused one of the experts in the law to confront Jesus with the seriousness of the charges, stating, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too" (v. 45). These experts in the law developed the oral tradition to provide clarification and to explain how to carry out what was in the written Law of Moses.

The experts in the law were not without sin. Jesus revealed their sin by saying, "You load people with burdens that are hard to carry, and yet you yourselves don't touch these burdens with one of your fingers" (v. 46). Their sin was the same as the Pharisees but with an added twist. The experts found or developed loopholes for themselves that allowed them not to "touch these burdens with one of your fingers."

Jesus confronted the Pharisees with their sin, but He also pointed to the solution for their sin. They should have lived out and taught about love for God and justice toward others.

WHEN HAVE YOU SEEN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES EMPHASIZED INSTEAD OF LOVE AND JUSTICE?

32 YOU

Call Out Your Inner Circle

// Luke 12:1-3

With the Pharisees' sin of hypocrisy fresh on His mind, Jesus warned His disciples about it: "Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (v. 1). His warning calls us to make sure we have a good grasp on the definition and nature of hypocrisy. Below is critical information about spiritual hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is pretending to have virtues or convictions you don't actually possess.¹



Hypocrisy is fed by pride. We've heard the saying, "Do as I say, not as I do," which is a form of hypocrisy. The concept behind the saying is to exempt oneself from what others must do. In some circumstances, such an approach can be necessary because of different roles for people, but more often than not, it's rooted in pride. I'm special; I get a break from the obligation of obedience. Such was the attitude of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees desire to be popular, which in turn would give them more influence and power, made it necessary to put on the outward appearance of righteousness and piety. The more perfect they appeared to be, the more popular they would become. The more popular they became, the more benefits that would come their way. Jesus wasn't seeking popularity, and neither should the disciples. That's not what the kingdom is about.

Hypocrisy is ruthless. We see this represented by Jesus's comparison of hypocrisy with leaven, or yeast. A small amount of yeast added to dough

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will permeate the dough and cause it to rise in a uniform fashion. In the same way, hypocrisy in the small issues of faith can easily spread to the larger issues of faith.

Hypocrisy falsely believes it can fool everyone. The person enslaved to hypocrisy knows how it works. Maintaining the false appearance of righteousness can be wearisome, but for the prideful, the power-hungry, the influencers, it seems to be worth it.

Jesus applied this principle to people by saying, "Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in an ear in private rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops" (v. 3). This language reminds us of the story of Elisha knowing the top-secret battle plans of the king of the Arameans and repeatedly warning the king of Israel to be on guard (2 Kings 6:8-10). Jesus was saying, "Don't be fooled into thinking that you can hide your sins from God. The secret sins you have so carefully kept hidden will be made known."

Here is our reason to do the difficult work of pointing out sin and pointing to Christ. We know how serious sin is. Out of love for others, we are compelled to point out their sin and make known their greatest need, which is forgiveness and salvation by faith in Jesus.

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS SIN IN SOMEONE'S LIFE WITHOUT BEING JUDGMENTAL?

DID YOU KNOW?

Let's face it, people don't like to be called out. In fact, when called out, many people react in one of two ways. They either say "God knows my heart" or they say, "Don't judge me." There may be some truth in these statements (God does indeed know us and people shouldn't rush to judge others), but people shouldn't use the statements to avoid accountability for their behavior. As believers, we have the responsibility to let others know when they are out of line with God's will, especially if they claim to be following Him. We are to do this lovingly and with humility, considering our own temptations to sin. The difference between calling out sin and judging people is about the motive involved and the result desired. Correction is not dragging people in their mess, it's refusing to leave them stuck. Calling out sin, when done correctly, calls people to repentance and restoration of fellowship with God and other people.

Biblical Truth: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

How can we guard against being hypocritical as we call out sin and point others to God?

LIVE IT

Who do you love enough to speak up when they're doing wrong and point them to Jesus?

If we love others, we will speak plainly to them about their sin and point them to Jesus, who can forgive and restore. However, correction without relationship can feel like judgment. Time spent in relationship earns us the right to speak and we must want them to have a right relationship with God above all. Select an activity below to deal with sin in your life and in the lives of others:

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- **Confess.** Before we call out the sins of others, we must admit our own sin. Confess your sins to the Lord. Make confession of sin part of your daily time with God.
- **Express.** Voice record or write down your sins as an alternate way of confession and calling things out. Listen to your tone of voice, look for compassion and care in the words you write or say. Note any obstacle that might hinder a positive change to your confession.
- **Address.** Address others' need forgiveness and salvation? Begin praying for their salvation and for the opportunity to point them to Jesus.

DAILY READINGS

1. WALK THE TALK// PSALM 24:4

God honors pure motives. There is an expression that says that people should “walk their talk.” That expression suggests that our words and actions should align. Hypocrisy exists when actions do not line up with words. We should strive to be more like Christ daily while holding ourselves accountable to His standards. True repentance results in a shift in our attitude away from sin and toward righteousness. It is not sufficient to appear to be a believer, we must actually be a transformed Believer who is not conformed to the standards of the world. In addition, one should not be complicit in the acceptance of ungodly behavior.

The love of Christ that meets people where they are while positioning them for where He wants them to be.

2. STANDARDS OF COMPASSION // LUKE 4:18

Jesus often criticized the Jewish leaders for their complacency, sin and hypocrisy. Although they sat in positions of authority and influence, they did little to demonstrate the love of God or to administer justice. Jesus identified the leaders’ prideful behavior as sin. When Jesus began His public ministry, he identified His key areas of focus in Luke 4:18, preach, heal, proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and set at liberty those who are oppressed. As believers, we should not substitute attendance at weekly religious gatherings over changing lives and caring about the plight of others.

Carrying out the mission of Christ reflects His compassion to the world.

3. LOVE CONFRONTS SIN// ACTS 2:42

No one is immune from the impact of sin. Romans 3:23 “teaches that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No matter how hard we try, no one can live a perfect life. We are tempted to yield to sin daily. In addition, messages in society often encourage people to retreat and focus on their

own thoughts. Believers must seek relationships with those who are submissive to the Word of God. Having Godly fellowship and encouraging others is essential to living a victorious life. When we recognize behavior and actions that can sabotage a relationship with God, the love of Christ should lead us to share with kindness and wisdom.

The restorative love of Christ guides through even the toughest conversations.

4. LOVE SPEAKS TRUTH// JOHN 16:13

In the movie, A Few Good Men, one of the lead characters exhorts at a climactic moment, “You can’t handle the truth.” However, the Bible teaches that the truth sets us free. So, while it may be true that many in the world struggle with truth and honesty, Believers are blessed to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit of truth gives us the ability to speak and receive spiritual truths that build our faith while identifying barriers to the building process. The Spirit of truth partnered with the perfect love of God enables Believers to identify and remove sinful behaviors that interfere with sound Christian growth and development.

As believers we are empowered to speak the truth in love and help others grow.

5. REJOICING IN TRUTH// 1 CORINTHIANS 13:6

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, many people have been drawn to the voices of social media. Postings and memes on social media appear to celebrate and encourage acts and words of negativity and overall moral depravity. Many are drawn to these images as a moth is drawn to a flame. God has given us the tools to lead others away from the flame. Believers are called to be a light on a hill, having once been darkness but now light through our transformative experience with Jesus Christ. We must shun unrighteous behaviors and lay hold to the precious gem of God’s truth.

When the world is silent to goodness and righteousness, His truth speaks loudly.