

Matthew 23:25-32: Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup & the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup & the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷ Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones & all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy & lawlessness. ²⁹ Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets & decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

Intro: True, Biblical Love warns & points out sin. **Proverbs 27:5:** Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

We are in the last week of Jesus' life, & we are studying Jesus' last public teaching before He dies here in Matthew 23. Jesus is warning the leaders of Israel about their utter failures to obey all that He has taught. Jesus taught the beatitudes, but here the scribes & Pharisees are getting "woeatitudes"! Jesus pronounces these compassionate, sad, & angry condemnations upon them for their sin & hypocrisy. The scribes & Pharisees do everything they can to appear pure & holy & good & righteous on the outside, but on the inside, in their hearts, they are impure, unholy, bad, & unrighteous. And Jesus says they are just like their ancestors who also killed God's prophets. They miss the main thing! Last week: The main thing in life is keeping the main thing the main thing: Jesus is the main thing.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart: pursue true, heart religion in Christ.

1. False Teachers Focus On Outward Appearances & Neglect The Heart

Matt. 23:25-28: Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup & the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup & the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷ Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones & all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy & lawlessness.

a. The scribes & Pharisees looked really good on the outside but their hearts were rotten: They are like cups & plates that are clean only on the outside. Who wants to drink or eat from a cup or plate that is clean only on the outside? "Here's your cup & plate – I worked really hard to clean the outside, but inside are roaches & mice droppings, but I didn't think you'd care!" **Morris/Robinson/Boice/Barclay:** They, like gluttons, ate & drank luxurious food & drink obtained by acts of violence, robbery, & sin, but if the cups/dishes were clean, it's OK!

Jesus also says they are like whitewashed tombs (Job, Ezekiel, & Paul all use "whitewashed" to refer to a way of lying about the truth). They outwardly appear beautiful! But what's on the inside of the tombs – smelly, nasty decomposing corpses! They are like San Francisco that got all cleaned up for the President of China's visit/Pope to Philly! They are like me in my military school when we had room inspection – we had one locker we could lock, & we just crammed everything in that locker, & it was a mess! But we wanted what could be seen to look amazing! The scribes & Pharisees act this way. They do all their good deeds to appear righteous to others:

Matthew 23:3, 5: they preach, but do not practice; They do all their deeds to be seen by others

Michael Horton: What would things look like if Satan really took control of a city? Over half a century ago, Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse offered his own scenario in his weekly sermon that was also broadcast nationwide on CBS radio. Barnhouse speculated that if Satan took over Philadelphia (the city where Barnhouse pastored), all of the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say "Yes, sir" and "No, ma'am," and the churches would be full every Sunday . . . **where Christ was not preached.**"

Parents: You want more than merely outward good behavior. *Shepherding A Child's Heart* by Ted Tripp

- **Matt. 15:7-9:** You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
- **Matt. 7:15-16:** Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

John Piper: Look around in your life, in your church. How many Christians do you see bent with all their powers to know God more and more – more truly, more clearly, more sweetly? Or, rather, do you see thousands fighting graduate school sins with a grammar school knowledge of God? Some of you might say, “Wait, there are as many PhDs in theology who commit adultery as less-educated people.” To which I would say, “Probably more.” Why is it that people with PhDs in theology commit adultery? They don’t know God. You can read theology ten hours a day for forty years and not know God as beautiful and all-satisfying – as the highest treasure of your life. Who cares about knowing God the way the devil knows God? He hates everybody. His knowledge of God helps him hate people. We’re talking about knowing God . . . They don’t know God. They don’t know God for who he is – infinitely valuable, infinitely beautiful, infinitely satisfying – why your soul was made. There are more pleasures at His right hand, more eternal joys in his presence, than you could have in ten thousand sexual trysts [sexual affairs]. If you know that, sin will have lost its dominion in your life.

b. The scribes & Pharisees were absolutely nasty & rotten on the inside: On the inside they are full of greed & self-indulgence. On the inside they are full of dead people’s bones & all uncleanness! They are lawless, selfish, proud, arrogant, greedy for money, & they are like rotten dead bodies full of maggots & all uncleanness! Jesus says within they are full of hypocrisy & lawlessness! They are like a pastor who keeps up an appearance on the outside of righteous living, but inside he is full of lust, addicted to pornography, committing adultery, & using ministry for big money!

2 Peter 2:14-19: They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice & restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs & mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

John Piper: Pharisaic lovers of law-keeping – who may even take vows of poverty and chastity – are deep down, beneath their whitewashed moral appearance, lovers of money (Luke 16:14), greedy and self-indulgent (Matthew 23:26), unclean (Matthew 23:27), and lawless (Matthew 23:28). In other words, those who are most rigorously devoted to law-keeping are using law-keeping to cloak a heart that is lawless. Meaning: God and His Word are not their authority (their law); their belly, their sexual organs – their appetites – are their god. That’s what “self-indulgence” and “uncleanness” means . . . The only commandment-keeping that counts with God is the kind that comes from a heart that loves Jesus more than money [and more than anything else!].

c. Jesus warns them to come clean: V. 26: You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup & the plate, that the outside also may be clean. [To be truly clean on the outside, the inside must be truly clean first!] **GOSPEL!**

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

d. How are we tempted to act like the scribes & Pharisees? 1) We might have secret sins in our lives we are

unwilling to confess & forsake: 1 John 1:5-2:2: This is the message we have heard from him & proclaim to you, that God is light, & in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie & do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, & the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, & the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful & just to forgive us our sins & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, & his word is not in us. ^{2:1} My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

2) We might be unwilling or slow to confess sin to one another: James 5:16: Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

3) We might go through the motions in spiritual disciplines while our hearts are far from God: We're just trying to get it done instead of truly knowing/communing with/meeting with God. We might heart-murder when interrupted.

4) We might be unwilling to show & tell others the truth about what's going on in our lives because we want to keep up the outward appearance that we are godly:

Rebecca Manley Pippert (*Hope Has Its Reasons*): Several years ago after I had finished speaking at a conference, a lovely woman came to the platform. She obviously wanted to speak to me & the moment I turned to her, tears welled up in her eyes. We made our way to a room where we could talk privately. It was clear from looking at her that she was sensitive but tortured. She sobbed as she told me the following story. Years before, she & her fiance (to whom she was now married) had been the youth workers at a large conservative church. They were a well-known couple & had an extraordinary impact on the young people. Everyone looked up to them & admired them tremendously. A few months before they were to be married they began having sexual relations. That left them burdened enough with a sense of guilt & hypocrisy. But then she discovered she was pregnant. "You can't imagine what the implications would have been of admitting this to our church," she said. "To confess that we were preaching one thing & living another would have been intolerable. The congregation was so conservative & had never been touched by any scandal. We felt they wouldn't be able to handle knowing about our situation. Nor could we bear the humiliation. So we made the most excruciating decision I have ever made. I had an abortion. My wedding day was the worst day of my entire life. Everyone in the church was smiling at me, thinking me a bride beaming in innocence. But do you know what was going through my head as I walked down the aisle? All I could think to myself was You're a murderer. You were so proud that you couldn't bear the shame & humiliation of being exposed for what you are. But I know what you are & so does God. You have murdered an innocent baby." She was sobbing so deeply that she could not speak. As I put my arms around her a thought came to me very strongly. But I was afraid to say it. I knew if it was not from God that it could be very destructive. So I prayed silently for the wisdom to help her. She continued. "I just can't believe that I could do something so horrible. How could I have murdered an innocent life? How is it possible I could do such a thing? I love my husband, we have four beautiful children. I know the Bible says that God forgives all of our sins. But I can't forgive myself! I've confessed this sin a thousand times & I still feel such shame & sorrow. The thought that haunts me the most is how could I murder an innocent life?" I took a deep breath & said what I had been thinking. "I don't know why you are so surprised. This isn't the first time your sin has led to death, it's the second." She looked at me in utter amazement. "My dear friend," I continued, "when you look at the Cross, all of us show up as crucifiers. Religious or nonreligious, good or bad, aborters or nonaborters - all of us are responsible for the death of the only innocent who ever lived. Jesus died for all of our sins - past, present, & future. Do you think there are any sins of yours that Jesus didn't have to die for? The very sin of pride that caused you to destroy your child is what killed Christ as well. It does not matter that you weren't there two thousand years ago. We all sent him there. Luther said that we carry his very nails in our pockets. So if you have done it before, then why couldn't you do it again?" She stopped crying. She looked me straight in the eyes & said, "You're absolutely right. I have done something even worse than killing my baby. My sin is what drove Jesus to the Cross. It doesn't matter that I wasn't there pounding in the nails, I'm still responsible

for his death. Do you realize the significance of what you are telling me, Becky? I came to you saying I had done the worst thing imaginable. And you tell me I have done something even worse than that." I grimaced because I knew this was true. (I am not sure that my approach would qualify as one of the great counseling techniques!) Then she said, "But, Becky, if the Cross shows me that I am far worse than I had ever imagined, it also shows me that my evil has been absorbed & forgiven. If the worst thing any human can do is to kill God's Son, & that can be forgiven, then how can anything else - even my abortion - not be forgiven?" I will never forget the look in her eyes as she sat back in awe & quietly said, "Talk about amazing grace." This time she wept not out of sorrow but from relief and gratitude. I saw a woman literally transformed by a proper understanding of the Cross.

Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart: pursue true, heart religion in Christ.

2. False Teachers Resist And Kill God's Truth

Matthew 23:29-32: Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets & decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

a. The scribes & Pharisees built the tombs of the prophets & decorated the monuments of the righteous:

They again are putting on a show with their outward behavior. "We honor God's prophets! We decorate their monuments & pay tribute to the godly!" And they do this because they view themselves to be like God's prophets. They view themselves to be the righteous ones. They even claim that they would not have killed God's prophets: **V. 30:** saying, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets."

Terry Johnson: They honored the memory of their ancestors, but they did not believe their message . . . they built their tombs, but they hated their doctrine. They loved dead saints, but they hated living ones. They honored ancient prophets but despised the living Christ.

b. Jesus says they witness against themselves: Jesus says they are admitting that they are sons of those who murdered the prophets. And Jesus says they are going to do & be just like their fathers! **V. 32:** Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. [Jesus tells them they are going to kill God's prophets just like their fathers!]

The parable of the tenants in the vineyard: Matthew 21:37-39, 45-46: Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him & have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him & threw him out of the vineyard & killed him . . . ⁴⁵ When the chief priests & the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Beloved, don't kill Jesus again: Heb. 6:4-9: For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, & have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ & have tasted the goodness of the word of God & the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm & holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, & produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns & thistles, it is worthless & near to being cursed, & its end is to be burned. ⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things – things that belong to salvation.

Unbelieving friend, don't reject Jesus: Don't be like the scribes & Pharisees who reject the only One Who can save them! Jesus was their only hope! Jesus is your only hope! Come to Him! **John 14:6**

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3. Jesus Was Clean Yet Counted Unclean So That You Might Be Clean Forever

Jesus was clean through and through (completely & to the greatest extent possible), yet He was made unclean on that cross so that you might be clean from all sin forever & accepted into God's presence where there is fullness of joy & pleasures forevermore!

a. Jesus was clean through & through; He's the Clean of cleans; & He came making everything clean:

- **Mark 1:23-27:** And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God." ²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, & come out of him!" ²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him & crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷ And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

- **Matthew 8:2-3:** And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

- **Mark 7:18-19:** And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, & is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

- **Hebrews 4:15:** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

b. Jesus was made unclean on that cross: He Who knew no sin was made sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus called the scribes & Pharisees whitewashed tombs, but Jesus was put in a tomb, as a dead, unclean man! He was a dead man's bones & all uncleanness! He didn't even appear beautiful outwardly: **Isa 53:2-3:** he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, & no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised & rejected by men; a man of sorrows, & acquainted with grief . . .

The unclean are cast outside the camp: Leviticus 13:45-46: The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes & let the hair of his head hang loose, & he shall cover his upper lip & cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

- **Hebrews 13:11-12:** For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. ¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Guy Richard: Just as the animal sacrifices were credited with the sins of the people, killed, and sent outside the camp to hell to be wholly consumed in fire, so Christ was credited with the sins of His people (2 Cor. 5:21), killed, and sent "outside the camp" to hell to be wholly consumed. And the idea is that all this took place on the cross. Jesus went to hell – the place outside of God's covenantal and evangelical presence – as our sin bearer, & He was wholly consumed in wrath & judgment. It was then that He uttered the well-known cry of dereliction: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). At that moment, God was treating Him as though He was sin – the sin of all who would ever believe in Him, past, present, & future. Jesus was wholly consumed in fire as the sin-bearing sacrifice, and we are told that this took place "outside the gate."

c. Through Jesus' death & resurrection, you are made clean forever: John 13:10: Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you."

- **John 15:3:** Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

- **Luke 11:41:** But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

- **1 Corinthians 6:11:** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- **Hebrews 10:19-25:** Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new & living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ & since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience & our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, & all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- **Revelation 21:27:** But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

d. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, you are free to be honest about your sins & weaknesses & learn & grow: You don't have to hide behind some fake presentation of righteousness like the scribes & Pharisees!

Alfred Poirier (The Cross And Criticism): The cross of Christ reminds me that the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me. And because of this, God has thoroughly and forever accepted me in Christ . . . What a sure foundation for the soul! Now, I don't practice self-justification, but boasting – boasting about Christ's righteousness for me. If you truly take this to heart, the whole world can stand against you, denounce you, or criticize you, and you will be able to reply, "If God has justified me, who can condemn me?" "If God justifies me, accepts me, and will never forsake me, then why should I feel insecure and fear criticism?" "Christ took my sins, and I receive His Spirit. Christ takes my condemnation, and I receive His righteousness." In light of God's judgment and justification of the sinner in the cross of Christ, we can begin to discover how to deal with any and all criticism. By agreeing with God's criticism of me in Christ's cross, I can face any criticism man may lay against me. In other words, **no one can criticize me more than the cross has.** And the most devastating criticism turns out to be the finest mercy. If you thus know yourself as having been crucified with Christ, then you can respond to any criticism, even mistaken or hostile criticism, without bitterness, defensiveness, or blame-shifting. Such responses typically . . . intensify conflict, and lead to the rupture of relationships. You can learn to hear criticism as constructive and not [condemning] because God has justified you.

Christ Jesus Is Pure Clean Outside
Within He's Clean, Nothing To Hide
He's Sinless, Beautiful Inside
There's No One Like Him, Perfect Guide
Yet On That Cross He's Made Our Pride
Our Greed And Selfishness Collide
On Him, God's Wrath, He's Terrified
"Why Forsaken?!" Alone He Cried
Counted As Unclean He Died
He's Dead Men's Bones Pierced In His Side
But In Three Days He Could Not Hide
The Tomb's Burst Open For Him Wide
He Is Risen! Glorified!
To Save Us From Our Sin And Pride
By Faith Alone Trust Him Who Died
He'll Make You His Pure, Clean, Loved Bride
He'll Be Your Joy Deep Inside
Every Want In Him's Supplied
All You Need He Will Provide
To Spread His Name To All Worldwide!

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