

Matthew 6:1–18

Hypocrisy: How to Have Wrong Righteousness

TSC, Renewal

MPT: Jesus exposes the danger of hypocrisy—doing righteous things to be admired by people—and redirects his disciples toward sincerity before God. He teaches that giving, praying, and fasting are not means of religious self-display but expressions of relational devotion offered to the Father who sees in secret.

MPS: Jesus exposes how even righteous acts can be wrong when they're done with wrong motives and for the wrong audience.¹

UFN: We all feel the pull to be SEEN as good more than to actually BE good ... to have people think well of us more than we want to be known by God.

Matthew 6 ...

A few weeks ago we finished up Revelation ... next week we'll begin about a three-month study in 2 Corinthians. But we've taken a few weeks in between to look at this idea of RENEWAL.

In the final scene in Revelation, Jesus said: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

- We've pointed out how this isn't some **future-tense verb**—as in, “one day, I'll make things new”—but rather, right now, in the present, he's making things new.

That's what this miniseries is about: RENEWAL.

- Week 1: Pastor Bryan showed us how Jesus brings personal renewal to us.
- Week 2: Pastor J.D. showed how he brings renewal through us, to our city.
- This week: I wanna show you how Jesus brings renewal in us—changing not just what we do, but why we do it.

STAND + READ

^{1a}Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

^{2a}Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

^{5a}And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹This sermon was massively influenced by Warren Wiersbe's message *SOTM: When it Doesn't Pay to Advertise*, preached in 1977 at The Moody Church in Chicago, IL.

⁷"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this: (read aloud)

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,
¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶"And when you fast (Notice Jesus keeps saying WHEN, not IF. He's assuming if you're one of his followers that you're doing these things cuz they're GOOD things), do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

INTRODUCTION

Anybody ever been to China? // Just north of Hong Kong is a place called the **Luohu (LOU-OH-HOO) Commercial City** ... it's a five-story mall famous for one thing: **counterfeits**.

- Roolex for \$80
- Guici bags for \$60
- Nike Air Jordans that say "Mike Air Gordans"

And what's crazy is that people travel from all over the world to go there and buy stuff even though they *know* it's fake.

- **But they still do it because they're not after authenticity; they're after appearance.**

This is exactly what Jesus is pressing on in Matthew 6. He's gonna show us how we can pursue all the **right religious things** but in a way that isn't after **authenticity with God**, but **appearance before others**.

CONTEXT

In Matthew 6, we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount.

- The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 is the **most famous sermon** Jesus ever preached ... it's Jesus painting a picture of **what his kingdom looks** like in real life as he explains **what he wants his followers to be and to do**.

The Sermon on the Mount begins in Matthew 5, where Jesus gives his disciples a picture of what he wants them to BE (salt + light) along with a bunch of WARNINGS ABOUT SIN: He talks about anger, lust, adultery, and lying. He's dealing with their **inner attitudes** that lead toward **outward actions**, wrong actions that come from wrong hearts.

- Then we move to chapter 6, which deals with **right actions** ... **but he shows how even those *can still come from wrong hearts***. In other words, **Jesus is gonna show us how we can have wrong righteousness**.

WALKTHROUGH

This is why, go back to v. 1, Jesus says: ¹**"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them ..."**

When we practice *righteous acts* out of *wrong motivations*—when we do *spiritual activities* from a *sinful heart*—that, according to Jesus, is called **hypocrisy**.

In fact, if you're a **first time guest or a non-believer** here this weekend, we always try to be so incredibly welcoming to you ... and I hope you've felt that way thus far. But this weekend, I'm just gonna be honest, **this is not the best weekend to be here**. Because all the **suspensions** you've ever had about Christians and all the reasons you **dislike** them **are about to be confirmed**. And the biggest one of all, I'm just gonna tell you, is true: ALL CHRISTIANS ARE HYPOCRITES. And sometimes the most religious-looking ones are the biggest hypocrites.

- Turn to your neighbor: **YOU ARE ... A HYPOCRITE**.

That's what I wanna talk about today (three movements):

- **The ACT of Hypocrisy** → define it
- **The COST of Hypocrisy** → expose what it does
- **The CURE for Hypocrisy** → see how Jesus offers the way back

The Act of Hypocrisy

We tend to think of hypocrisy as **saying one thing but doing another**. And honestly, that's usually what people mean when they call Christians hypocrites. You know what I'm talking about:

- You see the **church sticker** on the back of their car, then five minutes later that same car cuts you off, honks *at you*, then throws up the international sign of Christian love. HYPOCRITE.
- Or maybe someone left you one of the church pens along with a **terrible tip at a restaurant**, and beside it was a **tract** that said, “Tip: Trust in Jesus.” HYPOCRITE.
- Or you work at **Target** ... and all of a sudden, here comes Karen in her church shirt over to customer service, ready to unleash an unholy fury on you over a \$6 return. Like, “*Ma’am, Jesus didn’t die for this!*”

Now don’t get me wrong, those things are **frustrating** and **give us a bad name**. But that’s not the kind of hypocrisy Jesus is calling out.

When Jesus uses the term “hypocrite,” he is talking about someone who is **deliberately** doing spiritual things **in order to be seen as more godly than they actually are**. Look at what he says; he gives us a few examples of this:

²“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, **as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others . . .**”

- They didn’t sound literal trumpets, but in the temple, the offering boxes were kinda shaped like trumpets—wide at the top, narrow at the bottom—and when people gave, you could “throw your coins into the trumpet” and it would make a loud, echoing sound.
- What Jesus is saying: *Don’t make noise with your generosity in order to be seen by others. Don’t announce your giving like it’s a parade. Charity isn’t a performance.*

⁵“And when you pray, you must not be **like the hypocrites**. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others . . .”

- Jews would pray 3x per day: typically 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. Wherever you were, you’d stop and pray. That was expected; it was a good thing.
- But some people were using this as an **opportunity for visibility**. They’d check their watch, head downtown, find somewhere with lots of people, wait for the clock to strike noon, then they’d stand, lift their hands, and shout their prayer for everyone to hear.
- Jesus says: *You weren’t “caught” praying wherever you were; you planned to be there in order to be seen. That’s not prayer; that’s performance. That’s what hypocrites do.*

¹⁶“And when you fast, do not look gloomy **like the hypocrites**, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others.”

- Same thing: Fasting was a normal, respected, and *expected* part of Jewish life.
- Now, there was only **one commanded fast in the Law**: Leviticus 16:29–31, the **Day of Atonement**.

- But the Pharisees—the NT hypocrites—decided to fast twice a week to show their dedication, and they turned it into a show: They’d skip washing their faces, they’d let their beards be all gnarly, maybe sprinkle some ash on their head—anything to look **extra devout**.
 - Their fasting wasn’t about **connecting vertically**; it was about **getting praise horizontally**.
- Along comes Jesus and says: *When you fast, look normal, wash your face, comb your hair, smile. Don’t draw attention to yourself. Let your hunger drive you toward God, not applause.*

Now, this does raise a question before we get too deep into this: **How do we reconcile *Matthew 6* (*Beware of practicing your righteousness before others ...*) with what Jesus said earlier in *Matt 5:16* (*Let your light shine before others ...*)?**

- The key lies in the words “**in order to be seen by them.**” The key is in the motive → It’s not wrong to be seen praying or giving, but it is wrong to pray or give *in order to be seen*.
- I love the wisdom of **nineteenth-century Scottish pastor AB Bruce** on this: **Show when tempted to hide ... hide when tempted to show.**
- When your flesh wants to shrink back and stay silent out of **fear or cowardice**, that’s when you SHOW.
 - To that person, Jesus says, “**Let your light shine!**”
- But when your **pride** wants to step into the spotlight out of **vanity** and be noticed, that’s when you HIDE.
 - To that person, Jesus says, “**Beware of practicing your righteousness before others!**”
- It’s not just about *what* we do or don’t do ... it’s the motive behind *why* we do it. What Jesus is trying to get us to understand is how **the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.**

The hypocrite is the person who uses RIGHT spiritual acts for the WRONG sinful reasons.

When Jesus used the word “hypocrite,” that’s a word that was familiar in his time—in Jesus’ day, the word “hypocrite” literally meant **actor** or a **stage player**; *hypokritēs* referred to someone who performed behind a **mask**.

- Back then, they didn’t use makeup or special effects, so actors would hold up these masks.
 - Villain = scary mask. Good guy = happy mask.
- But you put that mask on because you were *acting*. The *outward* mask was in no way indicative of the *actual inward* person.
- So when Jesus called someone a hypocrite, everyone listening immediately pictured that scene: **a performer stepping onto the stage, holding up a mask to play a part.**
- That’s the image Jesus is using to help us understand what hypocrisy is: It’s an act.

And Jesus says, in essence, “*You hypocrites are those who take the ‘CHRISTIAN mask’ and put it on when you want ... and take it off when you want. You have taken these good things I’ve given you as a means of knowing me better, and you’ve become a performer stepping onto a stage to play a part that is in no way indicative of who you really are.*”

- **Church Sunday morning:** *Mask on!* → **Tailgating?** *Mask off!*
- **Walking through the lobby smiling, telling everyone “Y’all are great”?** *Mask on!* → **Arguing the entire weekend?** *Mask off!*
- **At FCA on Wednesday?** *Mask on.* **At the locker room on Friday night?** *Mask off.*
- **On Social Media:** *Mask on!* → **Alone in my bedroom with my phone?** *Mask off!*
- **Bible study?** *Mask on.* → **Girls wine night?** *Mask off.*

Hypocrisy makes faith something you **wear** instead of something you **live**. It’s **COSTUME CHRISTIANITY** ... it’s when we use money, prayer, fasting, church attendance, social media, a cross necklace, Bible verse tattoo, or whatever to try and make people think we’re more godly and spiritual than we actually are.

- It’s when you **post the mission trip photo** but you’ve never once invited your neighbor to church.
- **Quoting Scripture in your bio** but sliding into DMs.
- **Being kind to people who can help you advance**, but cold and dismissive of those who can’t do anything for you.
- It’s posting every **quiet time** you have on social media so everyone knows how godly you are.
- It’s **being the “fun dad” in public**, but you’re harsh or emotionally absent at home.
- **Treating your coworkers awesome** but your spouse like they’re an interruption.

Hypocrisy today isn’t just in *what* we do; it’s in *why* we do it. It’s when faith becomes a **performance** instead of a **pursuit**.

- Any time there’s a desire to be seen by others, or to be praised for something you’re pretending to be, or to make people think you’re holier than you actually are, **that mask goes right back on.**

And listen, I’m not throwing stones here: **THIS WAS ME BEFORE CHRIST! . . . I’d love to say it was *only* pre-Jesus Curtis that struggled with this ...**

- **Giving** makes me feel good about myself ...
- **Praying** on stage vs. at home ...
- Any time I **fast**, I let the world know about it ...

But here’s the thing: **Jesus sees right through that** ... and honestly, **most other people do too!** They’re probably going home talking about you behind your back (which is also hypocritical! See how we’re all jacked up and need Jesus!).

The reason Jesus is so irritated about this is because he wants us doing these GOOD things! These **spiritual disciplines** are meant to be practices we partake in to **grow closer to God** and **grow in godliness**.

- **By the way, this is why we do things like this here at TSC:** Night of Prayer and Worship, Nov. 7.

- But instead, we take these GOOD things (Bible reading, prayer, fasting, giving, serving, evangelism, worship) and not only do we use them incorrectly, but we end up missing out on the blessings they could bring into our lives.

*You see what hypocrisy is? It's living your spiritual life like you're on a stage—you're **performing for an audience** instead of **worshipping before a King**.*

- You put on the mask, step on the stage, play the part—hands raised, words rehearsed, appearance polished—but it's all an act in pursuit of applause.

The heart shift Jesus is calling for is for us **to stop *acting* spiritual, take off the mask, and step off the stage.**

Because if you don't, it's gonna cost you some things ...

The Cost of Hypocrisy

We need to expose hypocrisy for what it is and what it does. See, at its core, hypocrisy is a thief ... it robs you:

Robs you of AUTHENTICITY

The hypocrite lives on **substitutes** instead of the real thing. You trade **genuine faith** for something that just *looks* real. You stop living from a **place of authenticity**, and you start **performing for approval**.

So a couple things end up happening:

Your reputation becomes more important to you than your character.

- Your spiritual life turns into **theater**—you're **acting out faith** instead of truly living it, so everything becomes about **image management**, not actual **godly character**.

And if you're more concerned with reputation than character, there are things you are/aren't gonna do:

- *You're not gonna confess sin ...*
- *You're not gonna be transparent about struggles ...*
- *You're not gonna call others out about something that might be uncomfortable ...*
- You're robbed of the **authentic Christian life** because you're more concerned with **your reputation** than you are your **character**.

And it doesn't stop there: Money and words become props in your spiritual performance.

- You end up GIVING not out of love or devotion to God, but in order to *look* generous ... or even worse, because you think you're **earning some kind of special favor with God** because of how much you give!
 - But Jesus comes along and says, "Hey, *your checkbook doesn't make you spiritual.*" In fact, for some of you, it might be making you *unspiritual* ... don't forget what God said in **Hosea 6:6** and **Psalm 51:16–17**: "*I want your heart, not your sacrifice!*"
- Or when you PRAY, you might be able to say all the right words, quote all the right verses, make those "holy hums" at the right time so you sound passionate and spiritual ... **but YOU still never actually talk to God.**
 - Your prayers are just **empty vain repetition**.
 - The words might **sound holy**, but they're **hollow**.

See what hypocrisy robs you of? **You trade the true experience of godliness for a false appearance of holiness** ... it substitutes **performance** for **authentic presence**.

Robs you of INTEGRITY

"Integrity" literally comes from the root word "**integer**," meaning "**one**" or "**whole**."

A person with integrity can live with freedom because they know they are ONE consistent person—they're the same person everywhere they go: at home, work, online, or church. There's no **split version** of themselves.

But hypocrisy **divides you** ... it makes you two different people: one in **public** and another in **private**. It's what **James** calls being "**double-minded; unstable in all your ways.**" You end up with a church version, a work version, a friend version, and a home version.

- And if that's you, you know how **exhausting** that can be.
 - *I know how exhausting that can be ... **six months** ...*
- Some of you are so tired from acting and performing **like a Christian in public** while **secretly drifting from God in private** ... and it's wearing you out!

Listen: **The mark of a hypocrite is when you're a Christian everywhere except at home.**

- **Who you pretend to be in public will never blind God to who you are in private ... cuz who you are in private is who you really are.**

Don't let hypocrisy rob you of the wholeness of being one consistent person before God and others.

Lastly, **Robs you of REWARD**

Notice what Jesus says over and over again in vv. 2, 5, 16: **Truly, I say to you, they** [the hypocrites] **have received their reward.**

- **You don't get rewards twice:** You can have the **approval of people** on this side of heaven or the **approval of God** on the other ... but not both. **This is SO HARD FOR ME: I love approval!**
 - I don't know about you, but I don't wanna live my life for the **temporary approval of people** and then stand in front of God and he has nothing to say to me.
 - I wanna get to the point that *even if nobody praises me in this life*, that I'll hear **"Well done, good and faithful servant"** in the next!
- **Church father John Chrysostom** said it this way: ***If you knew how quickly people would forget about you after your death, you would not seek in your life to please anyone but God.***
- **Galatians 1:10:** **For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

Y'all, the applause of people will always fade, and when it does, your reward is over ... but **the approval of God lasts forever.** And that's where renewal begins.

The good news is that Jesus doesn't just expose hypocrisy; he offers a way back to wholeness.

The Cure for Hypocrisy

The cure for hypocrisy isn't about **trying harder to look authentic** or **doing more spiritual things** to prove something. It's not about performance at all ... it's about your audience. The cure for hypocrisy is learning to live for an **Audience of One.**

Notice how Jesus keeps repeating this phrase: ***Your Father who sees in secret.***

- That's not just a command; it's an **invitation**.
- The cure for hypocrisy starts with your private life, not your **public** one—it starts with just you and God.
- The most important part of a Christian's life is the part that only God sees.
- Again, that's why Jesus says things like, ***"When you pray ... go into your room ... go into that place that only the Father sees."***

That's exactly why Jesus drops The Lord's Prayer in the middle of this—he's not changing topics; he's showing us what **real, sincere prayer looks like.**

- You need to realize The Lord's Prayer was never supposed to be something we memorize and recite back to God, like he's impressed when we say the words the right way.
- It was always meant to be a **framework—a model**—for how we talk to our Father who sees in secret.
- He's teaching us to pray from a **real** heart, not a **rehearsed one**: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

It's like saying, *"Father, thank you for making me part of your family.*

I want my life to lift up your name in everything I do.

I want my actions to build your kingdom, not my own."

That's what giving, praying, and fasting in the secret place does—it **realigns your motives** and **renews your heart**.

- You stop using spiritual things to be seen by others, you **take off the mask**, step off the stage of performance, and into the relationship you were created for.

CONCLUSION

As Jesus is teaching this, he's not **shaming** you for wanting to do good things ... he's just **exposing why we do them**.

- He's saying, *"I don't just want your **behavior**; I want your **heart**."*
- The cure for hypocrisy isn't found in **doing more religious things** ... it's found in **returning to relationship** ... coming back to your Father who already **knows**, already **sees**, already **loves**, and **sent his Son to die for you**.

For some of you, that's exactly where you are: You *know* all the right answers—you serve, you pray, you give—but somewhere along the way, your relationship with God got replaced by a performance for people. **And it's exhausting.**

The invitation for you today is simple: **TAKE OFF THE MASK.**

- Stop trying to **prove** something to God, and start **resting** in what Jesus already finished for you.
- Stop trying to **earn** what's already been **gifted** to you in the gospel.
- The call for you isn't "try harder to look real"; it's **REPENT**—take off the mask, step off the stage, turn back to the One who already sees the real you, come before him even with your **mixed motives**, and let grace do what performance never could.
- Let the gospel free you from *performing for* God to *living with* him.

But there's another group here—and for you, this isn't about **fixing your hypocrisy**; it's about **finding hope for the first time**.

- You don't need to clean up your act ... you need a new heart. Jesus offers that!
- Jesus didn't come to make **bad people good**, or **irreligious people religious**. He came to make **dead people alive**.
- He did that by laying down his life for YOU—the *real* you ... the one behind the **image**, behind the **effort**, behind the **pretending**.
- And the moment you surrender to him, he makes you new. He forgives your sin, fills you with his Spirit, and begins the work of changing and renewing you from the inside out.

So whether you need to **take off your mask** or **meet Jesus for the first time**, the invitation is the same: [Come, all you who are weary, burdened, heavy-laden, and let Jesus give you rest.](#)

PRAY