

Session 4



# Calling Out Sin

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## THE POINT

*As we call out sin for what it is,  
we can point others to God.*

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A recent post in my social media feed had a headline that read, “Stop slicing your red and green peppers wrong!” Sure, it’s click bait, but I watched anyway. The chef in the video demonstrated the wrong way to cut a green pepper, which required numerous cuts and ended up with the seeds everywhere. After shaking his finger in a “don’t do that!” fashion, he cored a pepper using three slices with not a seed in sight and then cut the three pieces of pepper in long, symmetrical slices. I’m not sure there is a wrong way to slice a pepper, but the chef made this method look easy.

Believers need to connect with others in the same way the chef in this video did with those who viewed it. The chef didn’t just show the wrong way to slice a pepper; he also showed the right way. Likewise, when we encounter those enslaved to sin, we must point out the sin but also point to the One who can forgive sin.

### QUESTION 1:

***What type of social media “click bait” do you find hard to resist?***

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## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

### LUKE 11:37-41

<sup>37</sup> As he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and reclined at the table. <sup>38</sup> When the Pharisee saw this, he was amazed that he did not first perform the ritual washing before dinner. <sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> Fools! Didn’t he who made the outside make the inside too? <sup>41</sup> But give from what is within to the poor, and then everything is clean for you.

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

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 tradition amazed the Pharisee, but Jesus offered no apology. Jesus used it as an opportunity to point out the man’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. 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 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.

Sin is what separates and keeps a person far from God. Consequently, sin has to be dealt with properly before a person can have a right relationship with Him. Like Jesus, we should speak plainly and compassionately about sin, but we should also be quick to point to the hope found in Jesus Christ.

#### **QUESTION 2:**

***How does our culture emphasize a person’s outward appearance over the condition of the heart?***

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## **LUKE 11:42-46**

<sup>42</sup> “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. <sup>43</sup> “Woe to you Pharisees! You love the front seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup> “Woe to you! You are like unmarked graves; the people who walk over them don’t know it.” <sup>45</sup> One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things you insult us too.” <sup>46</sup> 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.

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 and disregarded obedience to the weightier ones. Jesus spoke plainly about the

Pharisees’ hypocrisy, starting with their focus on the religious practice of tithing.

The oral laws developed by the Pharisees went to extremes sometimes. Jesus pointed this out by mentioning the tithing practices of the Pharisees. Tithing is biblical, but counting tiny portions of herbs turns it into legalism. On top of that, Jesus declared they showed little or no regard for important matters, like justice

and love for God. This combination produces hypocrisy with serious consequences.

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). Instead of guiding God's people into a deeper relationship with God, the Pharisees reduced the covenant to empty ritual. 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 also spoke plainly of the effect the Pharisees' sin had on them and God's people by comparing them to unmarked graves. The comparison is rooted in the clean/unclean laws which state that contact with a dead body would render a person unclean. Knowingly walking over a grave was avoided for this reason but an unmarked grave would be hard to avoid. The Pharisees' outward appearance of righteousness masked the reality that they were dead spiritually. Like an unmarked grave, the

deadness of the Pharisees defiled the people without the people knowing it.

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. This application of the oral laws was what fostered much of the conflict between the Pharisees and the actions of Jesus during His ministry.

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."

We can't mince words or speak in generalities when it comes to pointing out sin; too much is at stake. 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.

**QUESTION 3:**

***Why do you think people sometimes emphasize religious practice over love and justice?***

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# Engage

## OVERCOMING HYPOCRISY

Hypocrites pretend to be righteous on the outside while they are hiding sin or selfish motives. In the list below, match the outward behavior with the inner thought that creates the hypocritical dichotomy.

### Outward Behavior

### Inner reality

Acting spiritual in public

Hoping for recognition

Judging others for sin

Carnal living at home

Serving or giving publicly

Living sinfully in private

Telling others they should forgive

Spreading rumors

Telling others to trust God

Holding grudges

Posting Christian messages online

Constantly worrying

**If you've identified any areas of concern in your own life, confess those things to God and commit to godly living instead.**

## LUKE 12:1-3

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.<sup>2</sup> There is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered, nothing hidden that won’t be made known.<sup>3</sup> 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.

With the Pharisees’ sin of *hypocrisy* fresh on His mind, Jesus warned His disciples about it. His warning calls us to make sure we have a good grasp on the nature of *hypocrisy*. Below is critical information about spiritual *hypocrisy*.

*Hypocrisy* is pretending to have virtues or convictions you don’t actually possess. In simple terms, *spiritual hypocrisy* is an outward appearance of righteousness that masks the sinful condition of the heart. 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.

### QUESTION 4:

***How can we guard against being hypocritical?***

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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 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.

Jesus said, “There is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered, nothing hidden that won’t be made known” (v. 2). Think of David and his encounter with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12). The “secret” sin of David and the cover up was made known to the whole world for all time. With this one statement, Jesus leveled the playing field. Jesus applied this principle to people in verse 3. 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 the consequence of lostness: hell. 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.

### QUESTION 5:

***How can we confront sin in someone’s life without being judgmental?***

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## LIVE IT OUT

If we love others, we will speak plainly to them about their sin and point them to Jesus, who can forgive and restore. Select an activity below to begin living out this truth.

- **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 devotion.
- **Assess.** Who do you know who needs forgiveness of sin? Begin praying for their salvation and for the opportunity to point them to Jesus.
- **Express.** Using your phone, record yourself calling out your sin. Listen to your tone of voice, look for compassion and care in the words you say, and correct any obstacle that might hinder a positive response.



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