Matthew
Beware of Hypocrisy!
Matthew 6:1
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As I was preparing this week, I was reminded of the fact that we live in the change of eras, really, as we're watching the prevalence of AI come onto the scene. Now, I'm not opposed to AI, I use it every day, although I think there are huge weaknesses, and I hope to do a message in early September warning us about how to and not use this new tool. But it is true that AI can be a useful tool; but it is also being wrongly used to produce fakes and counterfeits, literally, everywhere.

Convincing videos, photos, and voice recordings that sound like real people are used for financial scams, deepfake sexual images, and even impersonating family members in what has come to be called 'Emergency Scams.' Criminals use AI to create online, fictional, family-owned businesses, businesses complete with AI-generated founders, customer testimonials, and promotional videos, all designed to convince buyers that they're supporting small businesses when they are actually buying low-quality, cheap, imported products. Online marketplaces have fake product photos so that the products that buyers actually receive in the mail barely resemble those on the website images. Many are using AI to generate fake product reviews, and even fake influencers to promote their products. Crooks, who counterfeit name-brand products now, use AI to create professional ads, realistic packaging, fake labels, and extremely convincing websites. This one may come as a surprise to you, but many books sold on Amazon today, including Christian and theological books, are completely AI-generated. The authors are fake, the bios are fake, even the photos are AI-generated!

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Now, all of that deception that's at large in our culture is certainly deeply troubling. But a far more dangerous and deadly reality is that mixed among true believers, in churches like this one, are unbelievers hidden beneath a counterfeit character and deep fake spirituality. Sadly, even true believers can be tempted to settle for fake spirituality, for spiritual hypocrisy. Today, in "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus deals with this deadly danger.

Now, as we begin Matthew 6 and a new section of Jesus' sermon, let me briefly remind you of "The Structure of The Sermon on the Mount." He begins with what really is a kind of introduction talking about "The Citizens of the Kingdom," (5:3-16). In the first part of chapter 5, He describes "Their Character" in 'The Beatitudes,' and He describes "Their Influence" as salt and light.

Beginning in chapter 5, verse 17, and running all the way through chapter 7, verse 12, is "The Righteousness of The Kingdom." And the righteousness of kingdom citizens is marked by "A Right Relationship to Scripture," that's the second half of chapter 5, by "A Right Relationship to God," that's the entirety of chapter 6, and by "A Right Relationship to Others," that's the first half of chapter 7.

Jesus then finishes the sermon, the second half of chapter 7, by pointing out "The Dangers of the Kingdom," (7:13-27) and there are three of them. The first danger is "The Wrong Entrance." In other words, you think you're getting into the kingdom, but you found the wrong entrance. It's not really how you come to know God. There are "False Teachers" directing people to the wrong entrance. And then sadly, there's even "A False Profession," that is those who claim the Biblical Jesus and the Biblical Gospel but prove in the end not to be the real thing.

Now, as I pointed out, in chapter 5, verse 17, to chapter 7, verse 12, is really the body of Jesus' sermon. And the body of the message is bracketed on both ends with the expression, “The Law and the Prophets.” So “The Sermon on the Mount” is really Jesus’ teaching on the Old Testament; His explanation of the big picture, the grid through which to see the Old Testament.

So, how does chapter 6, then, fit into the flow of Jesus' argument in the sermon? Well, you remember in chapter 5, He explained that His true disciples are characterized by true righteousness. That is, by obedience to the Scripture in the heart, from the heart. Jesus summarized that righteousness that Scripture demands by reducing the entire Old Testament to two commands. In another place, you remember, “Love God with all your heart...love your neighbor as yourself;” those are the two great commandments. In Matthew 6, Jesus deals with the exclusive love that we owe God.

Now, it's about loving God, then, more than anything else. And chapter 6 is divided into two sections. Verses 1 through 18, we can call “Overcoming Hypocrisy.” And here, we learn that we must love God and seek His glory rather than loving ourselves and seeking our own glory. The second half of chapter 6, beginning in verse 19 through verse 34, we can call “Overcoming Materialism.” We must love God and seek first His kingdom rather than loving ourselves and seeking our own comfort and prosperity.

I want us to begin our study just of the first half of chapter 6. And in verses 1 through 18, we learn this, “We must love God and seek His glory rather than loving ourselves and seeking our own glory.” Let me give you the structure of these 18 verses. Verse 1 is “The General Principle.” This is where Jesus lays out the big picture. And then in verses 2 through 18, He gives three specific examples. The first example, in verses 2 through 4, is “When you give.” The

second example, in verses 5 through 15, is “When you pray.” Now, Jesus follows that example with a lengthy aside where He teaches about praying. “The Lord's Prayer” is in that section, but it's really part of, connected to this second example. And then finally, you have the third example, in verses 16 to 18, “When you fast.”

Now, in all three examples, Jesus contrasts His true disciples with a group that he calls “The Hypocrites.” Look at it, look at verse 2, “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do.” Look at verse 5, “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites.” Verse 16, “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do.” So this passage, then, is about the hypocrisy that claims to love God, claims to be passionate about God's glory, but in reality, loves self and pursues one's own glory.

Now, let me just warn you that today, I just want to examine “The General Principle” in verse 1, because this is really the framework for the rest of this section. Let's just read the first verse together, Matthew, chapter 6, verse 1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” Now, that verse is a summary of the first 18 verses and what we are going to learn there. And what we learn is that hypocrisy is a subtle, deadly, danger that Jesus' true disciples must constantly beware of and must consistently guard against. Now, in verse 1, in this sort of general principle as Jesus unfolds it, He teaches us here three critical lessons about hypocrisy, three critical lessons about hypocrisy. Let's look at them together.

First of all, the first lesson that we learn here is about “The Danger of Hypocrisy,” the danger of hypocrisy. Notice the very first word of verse 1, “Beware,” “Beware.” Now, in Greek, that verb, as well as the pronouns in verse 1, are all plural. So in other words, Jesus is not addressing this

to one person, He is addressing this exhortation to all of His disciples. He's addressing this to you if you're a follower of Christ; He's talking to you. And he says, “Beware.” Now, the Greek word for ‘beware’ means ‘to be in a state of alert, to be concerned about, to take care against.’ Our translators, the New American Standard Version, chose the word ‘beware’ in English because it implies two things that Jesus implies here. The first is ‘an imminent danger’, and the other is ‘an element of stealth,’ an imminent danger and an element of stealth. Jesus says this danger is always lurking nearby, and it can overtake you, Christian, by complete surprise. What is this danger? Look at verse 1. “Beware of practicing (Literally, the Greek text says, ‘of doing.’) your righteousness before men.” “Beware of doing your righteousness before men.”

Now, by doing righteousness, Jesus means all our acts of obedience to God and to Scripture. Everything that is obedient to Him, “Beware.” He gives only three examples, but His warning isn't restricted to those three examples. What Jesus is saying, beloved, is this, “Anything that you do for God as an act of obedience to God can be done with hypocrisy.” Think for a moment about your own spiritual activities, such as Bible study, prayer, corporate worship, service, giving, singing, and other activities you engage in as a believer. Jesus says, “Beware of doing those things hypocritically.” Why? Because hypocrisy is deadly. It's a deadly danger. In fact, Peter says in 1 Peter 2, verses 1 and 2, he says, “Therefore (Listen to this.), putting aside...all deceit (hypocrisy)...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” Do you hear what he said? He said, if you're going to grow through the ministry of the Word of God, you first have to put away hypocrisy. Hypocrisy will destroy your spiritual growth. It will rob you of spiritual energy. It will sidetrack you and make you really not receive the Word the way God intends for you to receive it. Jesus says, “Beware of this imminent threat to your soul.”

But Jesus doesn't just warn us of the danger. I love this, He also tells us how to recognize it. And so His second lesson in verse 1, He doesn't just show us the danger, He shows us "The Nature of Hypocrisy," the nature of hypocrisy. And He starts with its definition. Just a simple, straightforward definition. Notice what He says in verse 1, "Beware of practicing (or doing) your righteousness before men." Now Jesus explains what He means "by practicing your righteousness" in the examples in the following verses. Verses 2 through 18 show that He is talking about spiritual activities that Scripture require like giving and praying. He says, "Beware of the danger of doing those activities (Notice what He says,) before men."

Now, if you are really working along with me here, you are thinking about what we have learned so far, and I hope you are, that should raise a red flag in your mind, should raise a question. You say, "Wait a minute, Tom, doesn't that contradict what Jesus just said back in chapter 5 about letting your light shine before men?" Go back to chapter 5, verse 16, He said, "Let your light (the influence of your life) shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." You say, "Doesn't that contradict what Jesus just said, 'Don't do it before men?'" Well, there's a crucial difference between chapter 5 and chapter 6. Look again at chapter 5, verse 16, He said, "before men to glorify your Father." Now go to chapter 6, verse 1, "before men to be noticed by them." You see the crucial difference? That's huge! In chapter 5, Jesus commands us to let our light shine before men, and he does so to confront our temptation to fear and cowardice; don't hide, be who you are. But in chapter 6, He commands us to beware of practicing our righteousness before men, to confront our pride and our vanity.

So, Jesus, here in verse 1, is not forbidding all public acts of righteousness. For example, and we'll get there, but He's not forbidding all public prayer; Jesus prayed publicly. He commands

us to pray publicly in the church. You see, the real danger of hypocrisy is not doing your righteousness before men; the real danger comes in the next phrase, look at verse 1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.” That's the problem!

You see, that's the real danger of hypocrisy. It's not who sees, but who you want to see. That's the problem. A.B. Bruce, I think, puts it really well when he says this, “We are to show when tempted to hide, and we are to hide when tempted to show.” That's the idea. That's exactly what our Lord is saying. Now, the Greek word in verse 1, “to be noticed,” has the idea not just of someone glancing at you out of the side of their eye and seeing you. No, it's a word that means ‘to be gazed at, to be really looked at intensely.’ In fact, that word is from the root word that we get our word ‘theater’ from. In other words, you want to be the actor on stage, you want to be gazed at, you want to be the hero of the story.

Now, this desire to be noticed like that really was a huge problem for the Pharisees. John 5:44, Jesus says, “How can you believe when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and only* God?” John, chapter 12, verse 43, speaking of the Pharisees, “they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” You see, Jesus is here confronting the motive behind our acts of righteousness, behind our obedience to the Scripture. Chapter 5, we need to obey the Scripture in our hearts and in our actions, yes, but it's not enough to obey. Chapter 6 says it must be for the right reason. Jesus says, “If you're obeying to be seen by others,” then notice verse 2, “You are one of the hypocrites,” One of the hypocrites.

Now, the Greek word there in verse 2 is ‘*hypokritēs*.’ As you can even hear when I say it, we get our English word from that word. Our English word ‘hypocrite’ is really just a transliteration of

the Greek letters into English. That's a Greek word, ‘hypocrite,’ alright? What does it mean? Well, in classical Greek, several hundred years before the New Testament, it was used exclusively in a good sense. Most often then, it referred to actors in the Greek theater where they performed before audiences, literally audiences of thousands in large outdoor amphitheaters. Some of us are going to get the chance, from our church, to go to the cities of Paul, and we're going to go to the city of Ephesus, and there we will sit in the theater in Ephesus where in the book of Acts, they chanted for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” It's this massive theater that seated thousands. That is where actors performed their Greek plays.

When they were doing plays, each actor wore a large mask to help the audience easily identify the character that he was playing. It was common for an actor to play several parts in the same play. Usually, the actors were all male, and so one of them would pretend to be a female if there was such a role. The mask helped the audience know which role the actor was playing at that particular moment on stage. Since there was no electronic amplification, there was often a simple mechanical device inside the mask that enlarged their voice and made their words easier to hear by the thousands who were gathered in those outdoor amphitheaters. So over time, then, you can see that the word ‘hypocrite’ came to describe not just an actor in Greek plays but anyone who wears a mask and plays a part. By the first century, by the time Jesus preached this sermon, the word had lost all of its positive connotation. By then, it simply referred ‘to a person who wasn't what he pretended to be.’ He was an actor in the worst sense–a bad actor, if you will. John Stott says, “This man lays aside his true identity and assumes a false one. He is no longer himself but in disguise, impersonating somebody else. He wears a mask.”

Now, Jesus uses this word ‘hypocrite’ some twenty times in the Gospels, most often of the scribes and Pharisees. For example, in Matthew 23, you remember His sermon against them,

Jesus refers to them eight times in that sermon as ‘hypocrites’ or ‘as filled with hypocrisy.’ And clearly, they are the hypocrites He intends in our text. Jesus is using them, the scribes and Pharisees, to warn His true disciples against copying their behavior. He warns us, He warns you, Christian, to beware of the danger of manifesting the same kind of hypocrisy that they did. This isn't the only time. In Luke, chapter 12, verse 1, “He (Jesus) began saying to His disciples *first of all*, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, (Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees).” It's a powerful word picture. You know, if you could look at yeast under a microscope, you would see that it powerfully spreads from cell to cell, sort of exploding into the next cell in the dough. It's a powerful, pervasive influence. He says, “Beware of the leaven (or the yeast) of the Pharisees (What is it? He says.), which is hypocrisy.” Beware of copying them and of playing a part, as in the theater, to be noticed.

But listen, the ultimate purpose of a hypocrite is not to be noticed. What's the ultimate purpose of a hypocrite? To be praised. Broadus writes, “What our Lord forbids is therefore not publicity in performing good deeds, which is often necessary and therefore proper, but ostentatious publicity for the purpose of attracting attention and gaining applause.” That's what He is talking about. Now, in what sense is that hypocrisy? How is it hypocrisy if I'm doing what I'm doing to get the applause of people? Well, here's what makes it hypocrisy. The hypocrite <u>pretends</u> that he is obeying God because he loves God; but in reality, he does it because he loves himself–that's the hypocrisy. He's not doing it to love God.

Now, D.A. Carson identifies three primary types of hypocrites in the New Testament. Let me give them to you in my own words. First of all, “You pretend to be good when you know you are actually evil, and you do it to intentionally deceive others.” There's a great example of this over in Matthew 22; turn there with me. Matthew 22, and look at verse 15, you can see it really

clearly here, “Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.” So they have a clear, evil intent here, “And they sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians (But notice their approach.), saying:

> Teacher, we know that You are truthful and that You teach the way of God in truth, and that You defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar or not? But Jesus perceived their malice and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?”

What's going on there? They have an evil motive, they know they have an evil motive, and they intentionally put on a pretense to deceive Jesus. That's one form of hypocrisy. Sadly, there are people who are evil and know they're evil, but pretend not to be for their own purposes.

A second kind of hypocrite is when “You deceive yourself and you believe your own pretense, but others are not deceived.” This is the person who is self-righteous, who really isn't righteous but thinks they are, but nobody else thinks they are. This is Matthew, chapter 7, the guy who says, “Hey, come here a second, I need to help you get that sin out of your life. You have a splinter in your eye when he actually has a log in his own,” (Paraphrase). He doesn't see the log. Everybody else sees the log, but he doesn't see it.

The third kind of hypocrite is when you play the part of spirituality so well that “You deceive yourself and others.” Sadly, Matthew 7:21-23, ends with this kind of person of a false profession that the person really believes they know Jesus. You remember Jesus says, you know, “many are going to say to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ at the judgment, and I'm going to say, ‘I never knew you.’” They have deceived others and they have deceived themselves. Jesus will say, “Depart from Me.” By the way, a lot of true Christians worry they are going to be that

person. If you are worried about it, you are not that person because Jesus describes at the end of that verse, "DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS." That's who those people will be. They are people who claim to know Jesus, but live lives of complete disobedience to Him. But they have deceived themselves; they think they are really Christians, and often they will deceive others around them.

Now, by warning His true disciples to beware of hypocrisy, Jesus makes it clear to us that even we, beloved, can be tempted by this sin. So how can we recognize this danger in ourselves? Well, the sin of hypocrisy always has certain "Common Characteristics," certain common characteristics. How can you tell if you're a hypocrite? Well, just take this little test, alright? Number one, "You are preoccupied with sins of action instead of the heart." You are a hypocrite if you're always happy with yourself as long as you don't do obvious external sins. It's like chapter 5, right? You congratulate yourself for the fact you've never murdered, but you're angry all the time. Or you congratulate yourself that you have never committed adultery against your spouse, but you are filled with lust. Or you congratulate yourself that you sort of technically speak the truth, but you're always couching your words in such a way as to truly deceive others. All of those are in chapter 5. You know you're a hypocrite if that's how you live.

Secondly, you know you're a hypocrite if "You are preoccupied with the sins of others instead of your own." This is back to Matthew 7; you have a log sticking out of your eye, but you are all worried about the sins of the people around you, getting the splinter out of their eye. If your life is about looking at and being critical of others for the sins in their lives, you probably have a log in yours, and you are a hypocrite.

Thirdly, if “You are preoccupied with human rules and tradition instead of God's Word.” In Matthew, chapter 15, verse 7, He talks about all the rules the Pharisees and scribes had added– they are not in the Bible, but they said, “This is what's required to be spiritual.” Listen, that makes you a hypocrite. If you focus all of your attention on things that matter to you, but you can't find a chapter and verse for in the Bible, you're a hypocrite. It always worries me when Christians talk more about ‘their convictions’ than what is chapter and verse in the Bible.

You're a hypocrite, number four, if “You are preoccupied with less important commands instead of the weighty ones.” Yes, Jesus said there were lesser commands and weightier ones. You can't disregard any of them, but you are a hypocrite if you spend your time concentrating on what you can do and neglecting the really important things. It's what they did. Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, “...you tithe” your garden herbs. You know, you can see them out there breaking little basil leaves off their plants; “Now, look, there are ten leaves; I have to give one to God.” And yet, they neglected things like justice, treating people with fairness, compassion, having compassion for others, faithfulness. Maybe here, in a church like ours, you are all wrapped up in learning reformed theology and biblical knowledge, but you treat the people around you with very little gentleness and compassion.

Number five, you're a hypocrite if “You are preoccupied with external appearance instead of internal holiness.” Turn to Matthew 23, verse 25:

> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup (Worry about your soul.) and the dish (Worry about internal holiness so that the outside of it may become clean also.)...Woe to you, scribes

> and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

You're a hypocrite if you're all concerned about what you look like on the outside, but you never take care to pursue personal holiness in your heart. Those are the common characteristics of hypocrisy. And to whatever extent those describe you, Jesus says you are a hypocrite.

But they are not the real problem with hypocrisy, those things. The real problem is "Its Heart." Why is hypocrisy such a deadly danger? Why is it so bad? It's because of the sin that lies at its heart. You see, the danger of hypocrisy is not primarily seeking approval of people rather than God. The real danger is much worse. Remember chapter 6 is about love for and worship of God. But when our greatest desire is to be noticed by people, whom are we worshiping at that moment? You might be tempted to say, "People," but that's not true. You see, in reality, living for the approval of others is self-worship. By the way, this is clear in English, but it's even more clear in Greek. Let me show it to you. Go back to Matthew, chapter 5; Matthew, chapter 5, verse 16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and (Notice this.) glorify your Father who is in heaven." Now go over to chapter 6, verse 2, the first example of hypocrisy, "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets (Now watch this.), so that they may be honored by men."

Now in English, the translators chose the word 'honored.' The Greek word is 'glorified,' "to be glorified by men." The sincere Christian's motive is that God will be glorified. The hypocrite's

motive is that he will be glorified. So the essence or the heart of hypocrisy, don't miss this, the essence of hypocrisy is idolatry. Instead of wanting God to be worshiped, I want to be worshiped. Instead of wanting His name to be hallowed, I want my name to be hallowed. Instead of wanting His kingdom to advance, I want my kingdom to advance. Instead of wanting His will to be done, I want my will to be done on earth as His will is done in heaven. Hypocrisy is a kind of idolatry in which I substitute myself for God. That's the essence of hypocrisy. I want for myself the glory that belongs to God alone. That's why hypocrisy is so bad!

So, we've learned "The Danger of Hypocrisy," and "The Nature of Hypocrisy; Jesus' third lesson is "The Consequences of Hypocrisy." What are the consequences of externally obeying God and doing spiritual activities, but doing so to be seen and glorified by others? What are the consequences? There are two of them. First of all, "It often demonstrates an unredeemed heart," it often demonstrates an unredeemed heart. You see, more than half the times that the word 'hypocrite' appears in the New Testament and usually in Matthew, it refers to those who are not redeemed. It refers to the scribes and the Pharisees. This is a really important point for you to get. If you, think about you now, if you consistently wear a mask, if you consistently play a part that isn't really you, it's very likely you're not a believer at all. True Christians can act hypocritically. In Galatians 2, we find even Paul and Barnabas did for a time. But that's different than being a hypocrite, than having a life that is marked by wearing a mask. In fact, in our passage, verses 1 to 18 of Matthew 6, Jesus compares "you," meaning 'My true disciples,' with the hypocrites, a different group who are not 'My true disciples.' He's warning true believers not to be tempted to act, on occasion, like hypocrites who are not His at all.

What is the ultimate end of those who are hypocrites? Turn over to chapter 23, Matthew 23, and look at verse 13, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the

kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves (You are not true believers; you are not in my kingdom.), nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." They thought they were in; they weren't in. Look at verse 15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte (to Judaism), and when he becomes one, you make him (Notice what He says, 'you make him.) twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." In other words, He's saying, "Listen, you hypocrites are destined for hell!" But that's not just true of the Pharisees. Turn over to Matthew 24, beginning in verse 45, Jesus tells a sort of parable of sorts. He says there are two kinds of slaves, verse 45, those who are "faithful and sensible the master puts in charge to serve him," (Paraphrase). Verse 46, "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes." That's a true believer. That's one who lives the way he lives, whether the master's there or isn't there.

But there's another kind who claims to be a slave of the master, verse 48, "But if that evil slave (a different slave), says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time, and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with the drunkards.'" In other words, he just lives like his heart betrays; he just gives over to his sin; that's who he really is. He's a hypocrite. "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him*, and at an hour in which he does not know, and (Here's what Jesus does to hypocrites.) (He.) will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He's talking about hell. Listen, if around Christians, whether here in the church or in your home, if there are believers in your home, if you put on a mask, if you just play a part, Jesus says, "You may fool everybody else, but you don't fool Me, and one day, you're going to stand before Me, and I'm going to assign you your proper place with the hypocrites, and that is where

the worm doesn't die and where there's gnashing of teeth." In other words, hell, because hypocrisy shows you're not His.

Listen, if you're here this morning, and you've been unmasked, if this text has made you see who you really are, and you say, "I am one of those, I am a hypocrite, I'm living a life of pretense, it's not from my heart, it's not real, it's not for God, it's for me. I'm a self-worshipper," if you see that this morning, what do you do? You do what John the Baptist told the scribes and Pharisees to do in Matthew 3, verses 7 and 8. He said, "Repent and show fruit in keeping with repentance," (Paraphrase). Get serious. Humble yourself before God. Recognize before Him who you really are. Admit and seek Him; seek change from Him, the only One who can produce that change through His Son. That's my appeal to you.

But there's a second consequence of hypocrisy, and it's for those who really are disciples of Jesus. It's for many of us. What's the second consequence? "It always destroys the believer's reward," it always destroys the believer's reward. Look at verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." You have no reward. If you are obeying God, if you're doing spiritual things to be noticed by others so you get their praise, you get no recognition from God. Giving, praying, fasting, those are all legitimate biblical activities; but if you do those and other activities, in doing them you care more that others see you than that God sees you, then don't expect anything from God. That's what Jesus is saying. You have to choose, you have to choose. You can care that God sees and seek His approval and applause, or you can care that people see and seek their approval and applause, but you can't do both. And if you do spiritual things for the praise and approval of others, Jesus says, "You got what you wanted and that's all you're

going to get." The hypocrite seeks the praise of people and in getting that, he gets literally everything he wants.

But what about the true Christian? What do we seek? What should our hearts be seeking? Not the praise of people. But what 1 Corinthians 4:5 says, "that when Jesus returns, He will examine all the things in our lives, including the hidden things, good things that others don't see, things we did that nobody knew about," (Summary paraphrase). And then he says this, "and then each man's praise will come to him from God." That's what the true Christian lives for. The true Christian doesn't care what people think, in the wrong sense of that expression; he cares what God thinks. What the true Christian wants is to hear God say, to hear Christ say at the judgment, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We must never substitute seeking God's approval with the idolatrous goal of seeking people's approval.

Listen, listen carefully. If you perform any righteous deed, any spiritual activity, so that others see you, notice you, praise you, you will get no reward, regardless of how great or good that action itself was. D.A. Carson writes, "The hypocrites get what they are after, but that's all they get. The whole thing turns out to be a successful public relations stunt, and no more. There's no real act of righteousness, no genuine piety, and no reward from God." Listen, your obedience must be done for God. Your faith must be genuine and sincere, not a mask to build your reputation. When we obey, and when we serve, and when we do spiritual things to be seen and praised by others, we have become idolaters. We have tried to steal the glory that belongs to God alone. Look again at verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Jesus says, "Beloved, beware the deadly danger of hypocrisy!"

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the pointedness of our Lord's words. Help us to take this danger seriously. Lord, every one of us in this room have been tempted by and have given in to the sin of hypocrisy. For those of us who are truly believers, Lord, help us to root that out of our lives. I pray for all those who hear me today, what I prayed for myself, what David said, "Lord, search me, O God, and see if there's any way in me that causes you pain, if there's any hypocrisy in my heart and life," because Lord, we want to do what brings Your praise. Help us to deal with it seriously.

And Lord, I pray for those here today who've been unmasked, who in our study have seen themselves the way You see them, as true hypocrites. Lord, I pray that today You would produce true repentance in their hearts, repentance that produces fruit, the fruit of obedience, with a desire not to be seen by people, but to be seen and to be received and accepted by You. Father, help them to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation, and then to get on the path of righteousness that's all about You, and not about them. May You do that work today, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen!