

What Would Jesus Undo? Hypocrisy

Matthew 23:27-28

Sunday, April 26, 2026

What would Jesus undo? That's the question we've been asking the last 2 week and we're going to ask it again today. And I just want to remind us why this question is so important.

We're all familiar with the question, "What would Jesus do?" Or, framed a little more precisely, "What would Jesus do if he were in my shoes?" And the reason we ask that question is because Jesus lived the kind of life we were all created to live.

God created us out of the love that is His being, to live in that love. Jesus calls this kind of life new, abundant, eternal life. But, as we've discussed before, we are fallen. The story of Adam and Eve shows us how we've rejected abundant, eternal life in God's love for lives where we call all the shots. And in this state, we are quite simply incapable of doing what Jesus would do.

So, God sent Jesus to heal the breach. And that's what Jesus did. He started by living his life as a demonstration of what it looks like to live perfectly in God's love; to love God with everything we've got and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And then Jesus sealed the deal through his death and resurrection, enabling those who entrust themselves to him to actually begin living that new, bountiful, and eternal kind of life; to actually begin learning how to do what Jesus would do.

But the process of actually learning to do what Jesus would do is just that: a process. It is a process through which we work with the Holy Spirit to become transformed more and more of the course of our lives into the very image of Christ. And as that transformation progresses—as we become more like Jesus—we begin to be able to do the sort of things Jesus would do; things like loving God and everyone else.

And that process of transformation necessarily involves a lot of UN-doing. We and the Holy Spirit working together progressively undo the ways of thinking, ways of speaking, ways of acting we have learned as fallen people within a fallen culture. Living the new and eternal kind of life that Jesus came to offer us requires a lot of undoing.

And one of the things we need to undo is hypocrisy. Now, I haven't counted up all the things Jesus challenged during his earthly ministry, but this has to be at or near the top of the list. In fact, chapter 23 of Matthew's gospel probably contains the harshest, most stinging words that Jesus ever uttered during his earthly ministry.

The scripture we just heard is only a small part of it. He starts out the chapter explaining what he means by hypocrisy. In vv 2-3, he says the following: ²“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But *do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.*” That's hypocrisy. Talking the talk, but not walking the walk.

And then, having explained what he's talking about, he lights into the religious leaders. He says “woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” seven times in the course of this one chapter. In the passage I just read, he calls them whitewashed tombs, pretty on the outside but

filthy on the inside. Now, that's a gross enough image for us, but it would have been particularly horrific for the Pharisees because coming in contact with death rendered you ritually unclean. So, Jesus is saying their hypocrisy renders them inherently and permanently unclean; unfit for a relationship with God or other people.

He also called them lawless, which for a Pharisee was about as low as you could go, since their whole thing was understanding and following the law.

Then, right after the passage I just read, he calls them a den of vipers, a snake pit. So, if we learn anything from this passage, it's that Jesus REALLY, REALLY, REALLY doesn't like hypocrisy.

Now, lucky for us, unlike those scribes and Pharisees, we've got the benefit of Jesus' teaching on hypocrisy. We know how much Jesus hates hypocrisy.

Which is why we've gotten rid of all the hypocrisy in our world and our lives, right? I mean, no one today would say one thing and do something different. No one today would tell others to behave a certain way and then not behave that way themselves. Right?

Now, the natural place to start in a discussion of hypocrisy would be politics, but that's just too easy. So, let's talk instead about something a little closer to home: us Christians. Moral failures like theft and adultery among church leaders used to be scandalous. Remember Jimmy Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Baker? Their moral failures made big news. However, now, those sorts of failures have become so commonplace that the media hardly covers them anymore. The world at large just EXPECTS us to be hypocrites.

A study was done in 2007 asking non-Christians why they reject Christianity. The number 3 reason, given by 85% of the respondents, was hypocrisy. (By the way, the number 2 reason, given by 87% of the respondents, is what Paul talked about last week: judgment.)

[video]

Another study from around the same time found that despite what we proclaim to believe in, Christians cannot be distinguished from the surrounding culture in the following areas: adultery, divorce rate, gambling, visiting bad internet sites, theft, gossip, fighting, abusing people, using illegal drugs, getting drunk, lying, and vengeance. The only thing the study found that Christians did less of than the surrounding population was recycling ... and maybe tipping.

And we wonder why so many younger folks don't want to have anything to do with the church. They seem to be just as allergic to hypocrisy as Jesus was.

So, what is it about hypocrisy that's so bad. Why did it enrage Jesus and why does it turn off the rest of us. Well, I think it comes back to our fallen nature. It puts me, rather than God, at the center of the universe. It's fundamentally selfish. It's an admission that I think I'm more important than everyone else. I don't have to follow the same rules that I expect everyone else to follow.

It's like the guy who cuts in line when no one is looking but then when someone's fixin to cut in front of him, he insists that they go to the back of the line. Or the person who professes to love their neighbor but starts gossiping about you as soon as your back is turned.

And that's how Jesus saw the Pharisees. That's why he lit into them as hard as he did.

But here's the thing. I'm pretty sure the Pharisees didn't go into the whole Pharisee thing because they were evil. It certainly wasn't for the money or the power or the fame. Economically and socially, we would call the Pharisees middle to lower-middle class. And in signing up, they basically handed their lives over to God. They dedicated huge chunks of time and attention and effort to understanding God's will for their lives and in trying to live up to that understanding. They made all but the very best of us modern-day Christians look like spiritual slackers.

But somewhere along the way, they got off the track. So, what happened? What was it that turned these God-fearing, God-honoring people into hypocrites? For that matter, what is it that turns us God-fearing, God-honoring, people into hypocrites?

Well, I don't think it was because the Pharisees didn't love God or want to please God. I think their problem was that they thought they could earn God's love. I think it was that they thought they could do faith on their own. They thought that if they could just follow all the rules and regulations, they'd be able to qualify for God's love. They defined their faith in terms of what *they* could do for God, rather than what God could do for them.

But that *never* works. Again, we're fallen. We're broken. When left to ourselves, we're always going to mess up. We're always going to compromise. We're always going to take that first step that starts with the phrase, "well, just this once . . ." and before we know it, find ourselves stuck knee deep in hypocrisy.

So, what's the answer? How do we un-do hypocrisy? Well, WE don't. I can't and you can't. There's only one being who can, and that's God. We've got to entrust ourselves entirely to

God through Jesus, and then begin the process of working with the Holy Spirit towards change; towards transformation.

And the way we do that is through intentional dedication to spiritual practices; things like prayer, study, simplicity, service, and generosity. The more we live our lives for God through these and other practices, the more we come to realize that we really *can't* live our lives the way they ought to be lived, at least not on our own. We come face to face with our utter dependence on God, and we become more willing, and able, to participate with the Spirit in the process of our internal transformation.

And to help us with that, we've come up with these mini-spiritual practices; these wristbands. WWJU. The next time you find yourself saying one thing and doing another. Give it a little snap. Remind yourself you were created for more. And maybe say a little prayer, "Jesus, undo this thing within me."