

We Are All Hypocrites

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

23 August 2026

Children's Talk: Honesty is the Path Home

Being honest about breaking a rule or doing the wrong thing is very hard.

What are some rules that people break secretly and try not to get caught?

The story today is about a young man who left home and wasted all of the money that his father had given him. Eventually he had so little left that he had almost nothing to eat. At that point he realized that he needed to go home; but to do that he would need to admit that he had made mistakes and be honest about the things he had done wrong:

But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:17-19)

Imagine how hard that must have been! How do you think the young man would feel? It might have felt shameful and embarrassing. He must have been afraid that his dad would be so disappointed or so angry in him. But he also knew that the only way to get help from his father was by being honest. So he decided to do that. But listen to what happened next:

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."
But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:20-24)

How did the father react when he heard the truth about what his son had done? He loved him, and gave him gifts, and made sure that he was taken care of.

When we do something wrong, we can feel like if no one knows, if we hide it, it's like it never happened. But holding on to it means it sits inside of you and doesn't

go away. It will also make it hard or even impossible for anyone to help you. The only way to start fixing things is by being honest with the people that you have hurt or lied to. It won't be fun or easy. You might still get a punishment. But it will make it possible for you to do better, and to let go of the pain in your hurt, with the help of others.

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We are going to carry on with the topic of honesty or dishonesty by looking at a very particular kind of dishonesty: hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is when a person says and does things that are good and true, but they are actually covering up bad intentions or false ideas. This shows up when people say one thing publicly but act in the opposite way in private. Jesus mentions hypocrisy *a lot*, almost always when he is talking to one group of people: the religious leaders, the ones who did a ton of work to appear good and to say things that were true, yet often for all the wrong reasons. But the truth is, anyone who is trying to live a good life and do the right thing will have to wrestle with hypocrisy. To begin though I want to ask four volunteers to come forward to help us think about hypocrisy. One of you will be hypocritical and the other will be sincere. Each of you will hold up a sign that has a statement as part of a conversation. And then the person behind you will hold up a sign to show what you are actually thinking and feeling.

Hypocritical		Sincere	
Thought	Statement	Statement	Thought
<i>I would never be caught wearing something so ugly</i>	"I love that shirt, it's so... unique!"	"Thank you, I really like yours too!"	<i>Wow, I like their style even though it's different!</i>
<i>Ugh I hope they say "no," I'm only asking so I look nice</i>	"Maybe we should hang out some time!"	"Yeah, that would be really cool!"	<i>Hmm, it might be awkward but I guess it would be good to try to get to know them better</i>
<i>*Immediately starts chatting loudly with friends*</i>	"By the way, can you turn down your music, we're trying to study."	"Of course! I didn't mean to disturb you."	<i>Ah I didn't realize!</i>

Notice how both people are saying kind and good things; yet only the sincere one really means them; the hypocritical one is thinking and feeling unkind and even cruel things.

This is what Jesus is talking about when He calls out hypocrisy. He doesn't just want us to have good words and behaviour; He wants us to have loving hearts and wise minds. He used the example of a dirty cup or dish to draw attention to this point:

Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. (Luke 11:39-41)

No matter how well you clean the outside of a cup or a dish, you would never want to drink or eat from it while the inside was still dirty. The inside is the part that matters. The same thing is true of us: who we are on the inside is the part that matters the most; and if we don't work on cleaning up that part of us, then we really aren't growing spiritually.

As with the children's talk, we might think the things we think and feel, and do in private, don't count; but Jesus is clear that they will come to light; not as some kind of punishment, but because they are a true reflection of who you are. Jesus said,

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. (Luke 12:1-3)

Imagine if all the unkind things that you have ever thought were broadcast for everyone to hear. Imagine if all the unkind things that you have done secretly were shown to the whole world. Wouldn't that be terrifying? Jesus is warning us here that

no matter how hard we try to keep the bad parts of us secret, they do come out. One way is just that if something is part of us, it does change how we talk and behave. Think about someone who likes to spread gossip about their classmates. They might think to themselves, “well they’ll never find out, and what they don’t know can’t hurt them.” But having that gossipy attitude about other people will change how we talk to them, even just in our body language and tone of voice. And of course, often times those things *do* get back to the person that the gossip is about. We aren’t as good at keeping things hidden as we might hope. If we are going to truly treat people well and speak kindly to them, we have to also be working on how we treat them privately and even in the secrecy of our own minds.

The Teachings of the New Church also indicate that Jesus’ statement is literally true in the afterlife:

Do not believe that the things a person thinks in secret and that he does in secret, are hidden, for they are as clearly shown in heaven as are those which appear in the light of noon. (*Secrets of Heaven* §7454)

In heaven, there’s no hiding your inner thoughts. That’s really terrifying for most people! But also think about what a relief it could be: Instead of living in terror that people will see the ugly side of us, we’ll be better able to accept that we are not perfect, and it’s ok if people see that. Instead of hiding all our secret faults, we will be able to get help with them. The other side of it of course is that when what is in our hearts and minds is visible to all, they will also get to see the best version of us, the version of us that the Lord will help us become.

So the question is, how do we deal with our own hypocrisy? Anyone who tries to follow the Lord will have to wrestle with hypocrisy. I know for me it is really painful when I notice that I fall short of the things that I stand for. When that happens we might feel despair. But it is useful to remember that the Lord does not demand

perfection. We fall, and He lifts us up. It is also so disheartening when we see hypocrisy in other people. It is easy to become cynical because no one seems genuine, even people you admire. We might feel like there's no point in trying when so many people can't do it. But again the Lord calls us to have grace and compassion for other people, and to trust that even when they fall short, it is still worthwhile to try to live by spiritual values. (See Matthew 5:20; 23:1-3)

One of the ways we can invite the Lord to help us when we are wrestling with hypocrisy is by applying the judgments that we make of other people to ourselves. One of the easiest ways to become hypocritical is by having different standards for other people than for ourselves. Jesus compares this to trying to remove a small splinter from someone else's eye while we have a big log in our own:

How can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:4-5)

Sometimes we apply rules to other people before we have taken the time to apply them to ourselves. At the same time, we sometimes need to extend the understanding and leniency we have for ourselves to other people.

Let's think about how we might see this in our own lives. It is so frustrating as a child when your parents get mad at you for spending too much time on your devices, and not enough time with the family. But then they do the same thing! Why is it okay for them but not you? But if you think of your own experience, you know how hard it is to stop even when you want to, or when in the moment it *does* feel more important. They might be struggling to prioritise what really matters to them too. At the same time, the frustration you feel with them can give you some insight into why they have rules for how you use devices. When we feel frustrated by the hypocrisy of others, we have the opportunity to try to adopt the behaviour you wish to

see in others. That can be a helpful reminder to apply that value to yourself. And this is the same for us as adults too: if you notice some of the things you struggle with, it can be a helpful reminder to both have compassion for your kids when they struggle, and to work to hold yourself to the same standard that you ask of them. This example won't so directly apply to everyone. But anytime we have expectations of other people or frustrations with their behaviour, it is a chance to both reflect on our own actions and practice grace for others.

Realizing that you have been a hypocrite can be very painful and disheartening. It can make it feel like you'll never be able to live up to the Lord's expectations. And on our own, we can't. But the Lord does not leave us on our own; His promise is that He can change our hearts and our minds; He can bring alive the love and goodness that is present within us and cause it to grow; and when He does, He will give us the ability to keep His teachings sincerely, genuinely, and joyfully:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

Amen.