

Luke 6:39-49
A Life of Integrity

Scripture makes it clear that there is no third road. There is a narrow path and a wide one. There are sheep and there are goats. There is wheat and there is chaff. We will go to either the right or the left. There are the redeemed and the damned.

Having contrasted the blessed and the cursed, and having outlined the character of one who lives a life that exemplifies membership in the kingdom of God, Jesus here addresses the fundamental problem of the scribes and Pharisees. Simply put, they are hypocrites, and their false teaching had led the Jewish people astray.

There is no substitute for good Bible teaching. Though as a mature believer we have responsibility for feeding ourselves, that does not absolve the Church of providing solid Bible teaching. Though we do not use all the Bible that we know, we ought never to stop searching the Scriptures for truth that will impact our lives.

By contrast, think of the amount of evil that has occurred as a result of unsound teaching. The history of the Church is a testimony to its ill effects. Whether it was the heresies of the early Church as they tried to work out the doctrines of the faith, or during the Middle Ages when the Church was corrupted by works-based sacraments, or even today where even the evangelistic media is filled with half-truths and outright error, false teaching has permeated the Church. And the dangers of following false teaching are eternal.

Hypocrites are Blind

Jesus began with a question. “A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he?” (v. 39). The question did not need an answer; the answer was obvious. Blindness was common in the ancient world and, more distinctly, a condition for which there was little that could be done. Those who were blind were helpless and totally dependent on others to lead them and make sure they did themselves no harm.

But Jesus did not speak of literal blindness here. Blindness was an often used biblical metaphor to describe a lack of spiritual understanding.

Jeremiah 5:21, “Now hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
Who have eyes but do not see;
Who have ears but do not hear.”

Psalm 82:5, “They do not know nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness.”

The source of spiritual blindness is Satan, 2 Corinthians 4:4, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

It presents itself as arrogant self-sufficiency, Revelation 3:21, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”

The eternal destiny of these people, and those who followed them, is destruction. “Will they not both fall into a pit?” (v. 39). Again the rhetorical question requires no response. It is obvious that if you follow someone who cannot see where they are going, you subject yourself to disaster.

We are reminded of the prophesy Jesus quoted previously (Luke 4:18) that He had come to fulfill,
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed”

The reality is that among those who call themselves Christians, are false teachers who through their error-filled teaching presume to lead the flock. Both they and their followers are destined for destruction unless the grace of God intervenes.

But Hypocrites Are Followed

“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (v. 40). Perhaps this was perhaps a common saying at the time, or perhaps Jesus was simply pointing out the obvious. In the ancient world, followers of a teacher literally did just that. They followed the teacher around, heard his teaching, and practiced his ways. The teacher was as much a model as an orator. This would have been especially true for the generally uneducated men that followed Jesus.

As any parent can attest, much more is often caught than taught. People hear what we say, but they also watch what we do. As a student matured, ideally they became more and more like their teacher, until “fully trained” (v. 40) they were duplicates. Since a hypocrite does not know God, it is unlikely to think their students would come to know God through their teaching or their behavior. The attitudes, values, and worldview of the hypocrite would be reproduced in the student.

The goal of the Christian life is simple - be like our Master. Can we receive a greater compliment than that paid to Peter and John when people “began to recognize them as having been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Hypocrites are Judgmental

“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye” (v. 41) Jesus again asked rhetorically. One can only imagine the feeling of the person He was looking at as He spoke.

This was not meant in the sense of being discerning, but rather in the sense of being negative. Hypocrites are notorious for fault-finding in others. They pride themselves on the ability to identify areas in others that they themselves view to be sinful. The very fact that they do this points to their own self-righteous sinfulness. Their accusations of others proves their own guilt.

Even the very words Jesus used emphasized the absurdity of the idea. Can you imagine a blind optometrist? The word for speck, *kaphos*, means a small piece of straw or a splinter. The word for log,

dokos, means a large beam that might be used in supporting the roof over a house. This caricature is almost comical. One can only imagine such an illustration drawn out. The point though is clear. How can someone with a beam in their own eye see clearly enough to remove the splinter from someone else.

Notice, though, that Jesus does not say that one ought never to point out spiritual error to another. Instead, He says, “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye” (v. 42). Self-examination and repentance are prerequisites to leading and mentoring others. But perfection is not expected, otherwise no one could hold anyone else accountable.

A life of integrity is marked by humility and consistency. Paul challenged those Pharisees who believed righteousness could be attained by following the Law, “¹⁹you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, ²¹you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” (Romans 2:19-22).

Ezra 7:10 is a lesson for us all, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Ezra studied, applied, and taught the truth. That is what good teachers do. But even though hypocrites are judgmental, they also see results from their efforts.

But Hypocrites Produce Fruit

A tree is known by its fruit. While a farmer may graft one type of tree onto another (to ensure defense against disease and insects, or hardiness against weather) a tree is still known by its fruit. If we are believers then we have been ‘grafted’ into the vine of Jesus Christ. John 15:4-5, “⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Jesus says as much in this passage. “⁴³For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. ⁴⁴For each tree is known by its own fruit” (v. 43-44). And each tree can only produce in keeping with its nature. He elaborates in a similar conversation later, “³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil” (Matthew 12:34-35).

What we are grafted into, what we are rooted in, is our reflected in our heart. And our heart determines the kind of fruit we can produce. If we are not rooted in Christ, we cannot “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8) or live a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. Unbelievers might on occasion be loving, joyful, patient, kind and the rest, but it is not typical of their lives nor is the source the same. Only if firmly rooted in Christ can “the good man out of the good treasure of his heart bring forth what is good” (v. 45).

The heart is a storehouse, so it is important to consider what we put in it. Consider Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” We can fool others for a time, and perhaps even ourselves for a little while, but eventually who we really are will come out. It is our fruit, not baptism, or some prayer we prayed as a child, that is the evidence of saving faith.

Life in this world teaches us that the opposite is also true. Indeed, “the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil” (v. 45). Evil comes from within “for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (v. 45). The idea represented is that evil so overfills the heart that it must erupt in speech.

And for this people will be held accountable. The consequences of not bearing good fruit are severe. John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.” The illustration is clear. Trees produce fruit, and the quality of the tree is reflected in the quality of the fruit produced. If a tree has not been properly rooted, it will not be able to bear good fruit, and it will be destroyed.

A Question from God

There are many times when Jesus asked a question that was not intended to be answered. That is usually because the answer was obvious, and Jesus was only using a conversational teaching strategy to make a point. We have examples of that in this passage. Other times, Jesus asked a question because He genuinely wanted an answer. In speaking with a blind man Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51). He asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (v. 46). In this case the question was neither merely rhetorical, nor did Jesus require an answer. Instead the question was meant to make the hearer reflect on his life and see whether or not it was in alignment with what he claimed to believe. Jesus was asking them to examine their fruit. It was a clear way of causing His listeners to evaluate if their faith was genuine.

It is important to remember that Jesus was addressing Jews. No other faith is as close to Christianity as Judaism. Both are monotheistic and share similar values. Yet, Jesus was emphasizing that obedience to Him, non-negotiable, was necessary for salvation. John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” makes the point distinctly. Submission to Jesus Christ as Lord is a fundamental requirement of salvation.

Jesus illustrated His point with one of the most memorable pictures in Scripture. ⁴⁷“Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.”

It is a story that those brought up in the faith today learn as children. It was a concept these Jews had heard before as well. Ezekiel 33:31, “They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain.” People have always been more ready to agree than to obey.

Modern Christians often struggle with the relationship between faith and works. But there is no reason why they should. Faith and obedience go perfectly together. Scripture does not have the difficulties with faith and works that we do. They are easily linked. The Bible makes it clear that there is no justification without sanctification and no sanctification without justification. John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

If mere verbal assent was the equivalent of saving faith, then what could we make of Matthew 7:21-23, “²¹Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” Saving faith is quite different from knowing who Jesus Christ is. James 2:19, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”

Some things to consider.

Building a house on a rock is hard work. It takes longer, requires more effort, and costs more than just throwing up a structure without any foundation. It is easier to not read your Bible than to do so. It is more convenient to sleep in than attend worship. It is more comfortable to enjoy quiet time alone than extend ourselves in fellowship with others. It is more safe to keep our gospel to ourselves than evangelize. But none of this will build a solid foundation in Christ.

Storms will come. We must remember that difficulties are a part of this world and we will not be rid of them until we are with Christ in heaven. Until then, no matter how clear and sunny the sky looks today, we can expect storms. A full bank account and good health are no guarantee of what tomorrow will bring.

The outward appearance of both houses is the same, but after trials and affliction the difference is shown. The story gives no indication that one could tell the difference between the two houses merely from their outward appearance. Nor should it. The foundation is deep underground, hidden from the eye. Its value is only demonstrated when the house is shaken by trials.

The ruin of the house was seen by all. Nothing does more to undermine the efforts of spreading the gospel than the public failure of people who claim to be Christians. J. C. Ryle, “Open sin and avowed unbelief no doubt slay their thousands. But profession without practice slays its tens of thousands.”

Take Aways

May we appreciate the sound teaching we enjoy and earnestly apply it to our lives, so that we might live a life of integrity.