

THE MESSAGE

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Luke 12:4-12

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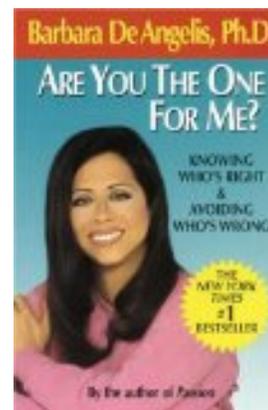
Growing: Conversations and Controversies

The word “hypocrisy” means “to play a part on the stage,” or “to wear a mask.” In the ancient Greek theater, actors were known as hypocrites, without any negative connotation. Over time the word developed a negative reference to people whose insides and outsides did not match. A person who professes one thing, but acts in a contrary fashion, is said to be a hypocrite. And the world is full of hypocrites.

There was a web blog recently where people were asked, “Who is your favorite hypocrite?” The most frequent response was, “There are too many to choose from.”

Do you have a favorite or famous hypocrite or two? Here are my top two favorite hypocrites.

First, is Dr. Barbara DeAngelis. Dr. Barbara is a renowned relationship expert, lecturer, television personality and best-selling author of 14 books about relationships, including *The New York Times* best-seller *Are You the One for Me? Knowing Who’s Right and Who’s Wrong*. (Show a picture of the book.)



So what makes Dr. Barbara a hypocrite? Well, for starters, her doctorate is from a school that was permanently shut down for being a diploma mill. But even more importantly this relationship expert has been divorced six times. Does that mean that her books and advice aren’t good and helpful? No. It reveals a gap between what she professes and how she lives – a hypocrite.

Now, just in case you think it’s unfair of me to pick on Dr. Barbara, let me introduce you to my other favorite hypocrite: Dr. Miller, me. (Show picture.)



I haven’t written any books, but my doctorate degree is real. Harford Seminary continues to produce leaders for the Church. If a hypocrite is someone whose insides don’t match their outsides, someone whose beliefs and convictions don’t always match their words and actions, then I’m a hypocrite indeed.

Consider this:

I say I trust in God's goodness and grace but I still worry.
 I say I believe in God's forgiveness but I still nurse grudges.
 I say Jesus is Lord of my life but I don't always live that way.
 I say that I believe prayer works, but I often fail to pray at critical times.
 I could go on, point is... I'm a hypocrite.

Christians are often called hypocrites. I used to be offended by that. But now my response is, "Duh! Of course we're hypocrites." We all struggle with the reality of being both saint and sinner at the same time. We are free in Christ, but in bondage to sin. We know that God continues to mold and shape us into the people we are created to be, but we resist the work God is doing in us. We forget that we are a work in process until we take our last breath.

We confess the perfect Christ... we are baptized into the perfect Christ... we worship the perfect Christ... we follow the perfect Christ... but we ourselves are anything but perfect.

In today's reading from Luke, we find Jesus talking about hypocrisy with the religious people of his day. They were acting religiously superior to others – all the while harboring greed, jealousy, and pride in their hearts. Listen to our reading from Luke 12:1-12... (*Read the text.*)

Jesus warned his followers to avoid hypocrisy, telling them that their heart and their actions would be exposed. He warned them about claiming to be Christians but denying the faith when the going got tough. Jesus tells his followers that they should fear God more than any human being, and trust the Holy Spirit when the time comes to bear witness to their faith.

Question: "What is God saying to us through these words?" The answer, I believe, is "quite a lot!" First things first. This message is not – I repeat not – to make you feel guilty, but to help you grow. So set your guilt aside for a moment.

There are three signs of hypocrisy when it comes to discipleship. Think about this like a physical exam. Sometimes the news we hear from the doctor isn't pleasant, but it gives us an opportunity to decide to live differently. In the same way, this message is like a spiritual check-up. If you find an area or two in your discipleship journey that isn't healthy, you'll have an opportunity to address it with God, and with God's saving grace.

The first sign of hypocrisy is *confessing Jesus as Lord without really following him.*

Most of us here say that Jesus is Lord. (10:30 – we say the Apostle's Creed. "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord.") What does it mean to call Jesus, Lord?

A lord is a ruler, one who holds authority over the lives of others. When we confess Jesus as our Lord, we're saying that we submit our lives to Jesus. We belong to him. We live for him. We make our lives, our days, and our dollars available to doing his will. It all belongs to him, anyway. He's the boss. Its one thing to call Jesus, Savior, believing that his death and resurrection saves us from sin and death, but calling him, Lord, says that he has authority over our lives.

Question: what part of your life have you not given over to Jesus? Be honest with yourself. In what area of your life are you stubbornly, intentionally refusing to submit to Jesus' Lordship? That's an area of hypocrisy and an opportunity for growth. Give it over to the Lordship of Jesus.

A second sign of hypocrisy: *reducing faith to keeping rules.*

Jesus pounded the religious leaders of his day with this one, and many of us continue the tradition! When Christianity becomes a new set of rules for people to follow, or – worse yet – a new self-help program, we've lost the faith. The fancy church word for this is "legalism." Here's how it works: we try really hard to follow all the rules, and we try to force others to do the same. In the meantime, our hearts go unchanged.

We conform our lives on the outside, but inwardly we are still filled with anger, jealousy, hatred, spite, and bitterness towards others who don't play by the same rules. Instead of loving sinners and we are all sinners, instead of loving sinners as Jesus did, we judge others and criticize them. If you walk out of here criticizing and judging others then you're a hypocrite and not a disciple.

The voice of my parents come back to haunt me from time to time. They often would say... "Robert, if you mind your own business you'll have enough to do." Oh, I find myself saying that to my children from time to time too. As children of God brothers and sisters in Christ this applies to each one of us too. If each one of us were to mind our own faith business we would have more than enough to do.

Here's the thing. The good news is we are not called to try harder, but to trust more, to have God work within us, changing us from the inside out. The gospel is not a set of rules to follow, but an invitation to live a life-transforming relationship with Jesus and one another. Question, how do you respond to other sinners: with compassion or judgment? Are you experiencing more fruits of Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – in your life now than you were 6 months ago?

These are signs of transformation in our lives. If we're not seeing these qualities growing in our lives then we may have reduced our faith to just keeping rules instead of trusting in the transforming power of God.

Third sign of hypocrisy: *living a self-serving life.*

As Christians, we claim to follow the One who gave up the privileges of heaven to come to earth, the One who touched the untouchable, the One who washed the feet of the disciples, the One who gave his life away so that we can live. Claiming to be a Christian, yet living a self-serving life, is perhaps the greatest hypocrisy of all. Jesus put it this way:

“Whoever wants to be great among you must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first must be a slave.” That is what the Son of Man has done: he came to serve, not to be served – and then gave his life away in exchange for those who are held hostage by sin. (*Mark 10:43-45.*)

How do we know if we’re living a self-serving life? Your conscience can probably tell you, but there are two other practical indicators: your datebook and your checkbook.

How we invest our time and our money reveals what’s important to us. Are you giving a significant amount of time and money to God? When I say a significant I mean are you giving so much time and money that it causes you to make some sacrifices in your life? That it reorients your life?

I am so thankful for my wife. There are times when I say to her, “You know honey, I would like to get this or do that...” and that something usually costs money, a significant amount of money. She is quick to say, “Sure we can do that but we will need to cut back on our giving to God through the church.” “Never mind.” I usually respond. Our commitment to Jesus and our giving to the Lord’s work is more important. And it causes us to reorient our lives.

Jesus died because we are hypocrites. Jesus died on the cross because we are not yet the people God created us to be. Here’s the thing, we are saved by grace through faith because of our hypocrisy and in spite our hypocrisy.

As you consider your own hypocrisy, you may not like what you see. Please don’t despair; this is an opportunity for you to grow. Confess your hypocrisy to God. Trust in God’s grace and believe in what God is doing in you and through you. God loves you the way you are but refuses to leave you that way.

Are there hypocrites in this place – yes – and there is always room for one more. Amen.