

WHEN JESUS LOOKS AT US, WHAT DOES HE SEE---OUR MASK OR OUR HEART?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

Several years ago I was on a plane flying from San Francisco to Portland and found myself sitting next to a very pleasant woman who was on a business trip. We struck up a nice conversation about a variety of subjects for some thirty minutes before she asked me, "What do you do for a living?" Fear came into my heart, for if I sensed if I told her what I really did she would probably reject me, ask to have her seat changed, or take some other course of action that would ruin what had been up to then a pleasurable plane trip. So I quickly answered, "I'm a teacher," hoping that answer would end the matter. But no, she kept pressing me: "And what subjects do you teach?" Again hoping to change the subject I said, "Literature." She still was not satisfied, so she asked a third question: "What era, Greek, English or modern?" I said, thinking of the King James Bible under which I had been raised, "Sixteenth century." There was a pause, and then she sat back a little, narrowed her eyes, and demanded, "Are you a pastor?" I died of embarrassment as I quietly said, "Yes." What she said next changed my heart and lifestyle. She looked me straight in the eye and said disappointedly, "Why didn't you say so in the first place?" I had no explanation she would understand or accept. It was on that plane trip that I had to come face to face with the Lord Jesus and confess my sin of hypocrisy. I was a man who professed to be a follower of Jesus Christ, but I had just demonstrated that I was very capable of putting on a mask to hide behind, a nonchalant sophisticated facade, to help me pretend I was someone I was not because of my fear of rejection.

Yet there is hope for all of us who find ourselves in a relationship with Jesus Christ that he can take away all the hypocritical masks we are still tempted to wear. One of the ways to be healed of this is to understand the God we serve. For he knows who we really are, and he knows we have no power to deal with our own hypocrisy. He states in 1 Samuel 16:7, "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." But his desire for his spiritual children is that they turn to him for the power to live transparent lives so that when the men and women in their community look at them, they see the wonderful life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we turn to Luke 11:37-52, we are going to watch our Lord take off four hypocritical masks the priestly class of Pharisees were wearing, apparently without detection until then. Here was a group of shepherds who were to be caring for the nation of Israel, and yet they were wearing elaborate hypocritical masks. It will be very tempting during this study to think of all our friends and associates who are presently wearing similar masks and and not think of ourselves. I ask you not to do that. Ask the Lord to show himself to you and to challenge your life. It has to start with us. From time to time we're all tempted to put these masks on, and they're very hard to get off. We may be able to fool those around us, but the question we want to address today is, When Jesus looks at us what does he see-our mask or our heart? Now, in fact, he sees both, but does he have to go through one of these masks to see our heart, or can he get right to our heart because it is a heart that wants to serve him and love him, so that we're transparent?

I. Does Jesus see a mask of purity or a heart of compassion?

Luke 11:37-41

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But

give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.

In Luke 11:14-36 we found our Lord Jesus confronted with a crowd who had gathered to witness the fact that "He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb." (11:14.) This mute demoniac was a physical symbol of the spiritual state of Israel, which had allowed Satan to cut off its voice of worship and praise because of its bent toward "spiritual reformation without regeneration," or trying to keep the Law of God in the power of the flesh rather than by the power of the Holy Spirit. The religious community accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Satan. Our Lord replied that he cast out the demon by the "finger of God," and thus "the kingdom of God has come upon you." The crowd wanted another miracle from heaven before they would consider Jesus as their possible Messiah, but our Lord replied that the only sign they would get would be the sign of his death, burial and bodily resurrection. He ended his conversation by challenging the Pharisees and the crowd to have their eyes checked because evil was excluding godly light, which dimmed their view of the spiritual reality: Jesus was the Messiah, "the Christ of God."

Then one of these Pharisees invited Jesus to lunch. He had heard Jesus warn the crowd as well as his fellow priests, and perhaps he wanted to hear more, or wanted to test him again (see Luke 7:35-50 and 10:25, John 6:6, Mark 8:11, and Matthew 19:3). It was probably the latter case, because they were seeking to bring a charge against him of either blaspheming or lawbreaking. Now, at this time the nation of Israel was living under the hated rule of the Roman Empire. But the Jewish leadership had managed to convince Rome that they could handle their own religious affairs under the religious supreme court called the Sanhedrin, which in turn was responsible for the spiritual shepherds, of which there were two classes, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were the well-to-do aristocrats of the priesthood. They were the "liberals" who were constantly trying to lobby with the Roman government to keep peace. They were not involved much in the religious services in the Jewish community. They believed in only the written Law and followed the Levitical laws about uncleanness even more closely than the Pharisees, but rejected the confusing mass of Pharisaic traditions that had been added to the law.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were the "fundamental" priests who had the greatest influence on the synagogue congregations when it came to their form of worship, prayers, and sacrifices. This group of priests became known as the "separatists." They had three basic tenets they lived by: (1) Use only what has been tithed by the people, (2) observe the laws of purification, and (3) avoid contact with all non-Pharisees. There were seven groups within the Pharisees, and each of these also avoided contact with all the other groups. As you might conclude, they were very uptight people! There may have been some 3,000 Pharisees ministering among the two million Jews in the land of Israel at this time. As in all religious groups there were good Pharisees like Nicodemus, who hungered after truth, and in the book of Acts we find many Pharisees coming to know Jesus Christ. But there were many evil Pharisees who were slowly going blind because of their greed for power and position within the nation and under the Romans. By the time of Jesus they had gained a powerful position under the authority of the Sanhedrin, to which they were responsible to keep the Jewish people living under the burden of the Law of Moses and their man-made traditions.

Jesus had entered the home of this Pharisee, and now he immediately reclined at table, which surprised his host. Now, God had given the Jews many outward symbolic rites of cleanliness to demonstrate his desire that his people have hearts that were morally and spiritually clean. As you read through the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy you find many ways a person could become unclean: eating the wrong animal, touching the dead, or becoming diseased, to name a few. But in each case there was a prescribed ritual one could go through with the priest and the use of water to become clean again. Jesus was not rejecting Leviticus or Deuteronomy, but the traditions of men. There was no law about the washing of hands before a meal in the Law of Moses; rather, this was a regulation in the Talmud.

The Pharisees had challenged Jesus earlier in his ministry about his disciples in Mark 7:5-8: "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" He replied, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men." The traditions the Pharisees had added were more important to them than the Law of God. So he said to them, "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the traditions of men." They were seeking by works to

gain righteousness and acceptability before God, instead of experiencing imputed righteousness by faith.

William Barclay, in his commentary *The Gospel of Luke*, gives us a little insight into this religious practice:

"The law [in this case out of the Talmud, not the Law of Moses] laid it down that before a man ate he must wash his hands in a certain way and that he must also wash them between courses....large stone vessels of water were specially kept for the purpose because ordinary water might be unclean; the amount of water used must be...enough to fill one and a half egg-shells. First the water must be poured over the hands beginning at the tips of fingers and running right up to the wrist. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of one into the other. Finally, water must again be poured over the hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips. To the Pharisee, to omit the slightest detail of this was to sin."

The Lord's response in 11:39 was: "Now you Pharisees [as a class, and not the particular individuals here at the moment] clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness." The Lord was challenging this Pharisee to come to terms with what he and his associates were doing to themselves as well as to the Jewish people. Yes, there were laws of cleansing, but they were designed to show by an outward symbol the need to have one's heart cleansed of robbery and wickedness. The Pharisees were robbing the people through the moneychangers and sellers of sacrificial animals in the temple. They were filled with greed and power plays, jealousy and fighting. But on the outside their hands were clean. The Pharisees were concerned with what a man did; the Lord was concerned with what he was. The Lord had told them earlier, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man." (Matthew 15:19-20.) These foolish ones were becoming blinded to the reality that the very God who created their bodies was the same God who created their souls and their hearts and that nothing could be hidden from him. "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7.)

"But give that which is within as charity [give alms], and then all things are clean for you." The NIV reads, "But give what is inside the dish [the food] to the poor, and everything will be clean for you." If your heart is full of the love of God, then your works of charity will be full of love toward the poor. That will show that you are walking in the power of the Spirit by faith in the God you say you love. If you love him, he will give you a heart of love that will make you want to share what he has given you with those who have nothing. Then and only then will the outside match the inside. Your mask of outward purity will be replaced by a heart of compassion toward the poor.

A few years ago Anne Marie and I invited a pastor and his wife from another church to our home for an early summer dinner. Before we sat down to eat, we all took a long walk on the beach and talked about many things, especially our families and ministries. We came back and washed up before we sat down together and enjoyed a wonderful dinner and more conversation. Finally it was time to leave, and we all prayed for each other. As they left, I remember what delight I felt about them as friends. However, within the month I received word from another friend that it had come out that my fellow pastor had been in an adulterous relationship for several months. Every one of us had been fooled by his outward display of spiritual purity, when all the time his heart was filled with adultery. I felt no judgment, but I felt ill and sad for him and his lovely, faithful wife and their innocent children. The whole time he had been wearing this mask of spiritual purity and trust in the Lord, and his wife never knew it. I was forced to sit down and think about my own heart and pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way. (Psalm 139:23-24.) Whenever you hear things like this, rush to the Lord about your own heart! God will take care of the other person. (Today this man is no longer in the ministry, and he has been reconciled with his wife. He is back on the road to recovery.)

When Jesus looks at us what does he see-our mask of purity or our heart of compassion?

II. A mask of giving or a heart that loves God and justice?

Luke 11:42

"But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."

Tithing was instituted by God in Israel as a means of showing one's love for him by supporting the Levites and priests who carried out the services in the temple, as well as by having money and means available for the aliens, strangers, widows, and fatherless. (Deuteronomy 14:29.) "Thus all the tithes of the land, of the seed of the land or fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD." (Leviticus 27:30.) There was nothing wrong in giving a tenth of all that God had given to Israel. But the Lord now moved in on the hearts of the Pharisees and gave them a word of warning with a heart of sadness. "Woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithes of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb..." The Pharisees taught the people that they were to give a tithe of the first fruit of the soil; wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey were all offered in the temple. The problem was that the Pharisees became meticulous in working out their tithe down to an herb of rue, which was not even required in their own tradition (Shebiith 9:1), yet they disregarded justice and the love of God. "...but these things you should have done without neglecting the others." Sitting with this Pharisee was the one of whom God said in Isaiah 42:1: "Behold, My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

To walk in the presence of the Lord is to understand that he has called us to a two-sided coin: They were to give a tithe to the Lord, but on the other side of the coin they were called to extend justice to God's people. We are to bring justice to a world that is unjust, and you can't do that unless you have a love for God, because in the love for God you have eyes to see for the first time what is wrong with what is going on in your community. "[The LORD] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD." (Psalm 33:5.) And the Jews knew that the Law said "Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow." (Deuteronomy 27:19.) They Pharisees were also so taken up with the duty of tithing that they forgot the command: "Hear, O Israel! the LORD is our God, the LORD is one! And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4.) Jesus has accused them of forgetting the foundation of their faith.

As Christians on this side of the cross we are not asked to give a tenth of our income, time, or assets; rather, in the words of Paul to the Corinthian believers, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7.) Our Lord wants us to become, by the power of his indwelling Holy Spirit, cheerful givers based on the needs that are presented to us each week at this church or in our community. But he also wants us to be sure that we are involved in a love affair with him so that he can extend his work of justice through us when we are faced with injustice. I have witnessed that many of you here are not only cheerful givers to our Crisis Pregnancy Center, but you are also personally available to help counsel young women to keep their babies, speak out in school classrooms, and seek to bring God's justice to this unjust abortion situation by voting in local elections. God wants us to participate, because of our love for him, both in giving and in bringing justice to an unjust world.

When Jesus looks at us what does he see---a mask of purity or giving, or a heart of compassion filled with the love of God and his justice?

III. A mask of a pride or a heart of humility?

Luke 11:43-44

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it."

The front seats in the local synagogue were the best seats for two reasons: (1) You could see and hear

everything that was going on in any given service, and you could be the first ones to greet visiting rabbis. (2) Everyone else behind you could see you from their seats of decreasing honor. They did not go to the synagogue to hear from the word of God but to get their ego stroked. The other problem they had, as they walked in their long robes through the market place instead of around it, was their great need to stop the common man as well as the merchants in the midst of their day so that they would call out a greeting. The more exaggerated the respect of the greetings, the better the Pharisees were pleased. It was a kind of popularity contest. Yet Moses whom they said they followed was called the most humble of men.

"Woe to you! for you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over them are unaware of it." The Law stated in Numbers 19:16, "Anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days." Even if he touched the grave without knowing it, and someone saw him walk across it, he would be declared unclean for seven days and would not be allowed to attend any religious services. Then the Lord gave his judgment of their character by saying that the Pharisees as a class were like unmarked graves and everyone who touched them became unclean because they were teaching a corrupt view of God and his word. Leon Morris wrote in his commentary on Luke, "People who walked over unmarked graves become ceremonially unclean; people who walked in the teachings and ways of the Pharisees become morally unclean." What a harsh statement about the shepherds of the nation! But these 3,000 Pharisees, as far as God was concerned, were walking around in society as unmarked graves, dead bones, corpses. Everyone who touched them was unclean.

When Jesus looks at us what does he see—a mask of purity, giving, or pride, or a heart of compassion filled with the love of God and his justice, and humility?

IV. A mask of evasion or a heart of responsibility?

Luke 11:45-52

And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too." But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.' Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."

The religious scribes or theological lawyers worked at interpreting the Law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers and then teaching these laws to the common man, as well as administering justice. In time they became known as the rabbis, the zealous guardians of the Law, and they held complete sway over the people in faith and practice. Now one of these lawyers said to him in reply, "Teacher, when You say this [the three "Woes!" above], You insult us too."

The Lord was seeking to take advantage of this teachable moment and show the Pharisees and the lawyers that in the sight of the people they might be held in high esteem and fear, but in the sight of God they were in real trouble. He wanted to take their masks off and give them a life that pleased God, that was transparent and real. But they felt insulted. "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7.) He was about to show this lawyer that he didn't see any difference between the lifestyle of the lawyers and that of the Pharisees. He then offered three warnings to them as well.

First, they put on a mask and evaded the burdens of the Law (11:46): "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of

your fingers." There are many recorded examples of these burdens they had added to the 365 prohibitions and the 248 commandments within the Mosaic Law, but let me mention just one, from William Barclay's commentary, concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. "To carry a burden was forbidden, but the codified written law [not in the Mosaic Law] laid it down, '...he who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt, or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it.' (Sabbath 10:3.)" But the scribes refused to practice what they preached and refused to lift a finger to help others understand the Law of God or the traditions of men in order to lift off the shoulders of the Jewish people the heavy burden of confusion.

Secondly, they put on a mask and evaded the charge of murdering the prophets (11:47-51): "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them." It appeared that the only prophets the present generation of scribes admired were the dead ones who had been killed by their fathers. But instead of feeling a sense of shame and guilt over the false charges and unjust death sentences, they covered up those feelings by giving money to the "Jerusalem Dead Prophet Society." God's judgment is not man's evaluation, for Jesus said, "Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs." Instead of carrying forth the dead prophets' message to the present generation, they covered their guilt by building tombs or memorials for them. They had the same murderous hearts as their fathers.

"For this reason also the wisdom of God said [the Wisdom of God is Jesus Christ, Colossians 2:3], 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel [the first martyr] to the blood of Zechariah [the last Old Testament martyr, 2 Chronicles 24:20-21], who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'" This is an amazing moment in the history of the nation of Israel, because the final prophet was sitting with them, the prophet spoken of by God to Moses some 1500 years earlier: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him." (Deuteronomy 18:15.) And they were already planning to kill him. Therefore this generation was held more responsible than all the other generations looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. For now he was here, sitting in front of them eating his lunch. The more of the light of God we have, the more responsibility we have before God for what we do with his spiritual light.

Thirdly, they evaded the key to eternal life. "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered." The scribes had made the law so confusing, so complex, that when people had genuine questions about how to have eternal life, they could not say it clearly, so the people walked away in disgust. In the process of confusing the common man they became confused themselves and couldn't find the key to eternal life. Christ had come to offer light, but the Pharisees and scribes bound up men in darkness. I recently saw a modern religious leader on TV asked the direct question, "How do you receive eternal life?" The person could not say how. He muddled on for three minutes, and my spirit wept.

In summary, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7.) When Jesus looks at us what does he see—a mask of purity, giving, pride, or evasion, or a heart of compassion filled with the love of God and justice, humility, and personal responsibility?

How can we avoid the same "Woes!" our Lord challenged the Pharisees and scribes with? For they knew the Law of Moses and then added to that law the traditions of men. The bottom line is that they sought to gain the righteousness of God by works of the Law of Moses and the traditions of men. They refused to place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior and depend on the Holy Spirit to empower them to keep the Law of God, not the traditions of men.

Paul had a lot to say about this when he wrote to the Jews living in Corinth. "But to this day whenever Moses [the Law] is read, a veil lies over their hearts. [The Jews hear the Law, and in their prideful hearts they say, 'I

can keep it in my own strength.]" And then Paul gave the Corinthians and every generation since the secret of our new life in Christ, the way to get rid of the various veils, or masks of self-adequacy and willful pride: "But whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty [to become transparent like Jesus Christ]." (2 Corinthians 3:15-17.) Then Jesus can live his life in and through us, so when men and women are around us and ask us questions, they see Jesus immediately, not a mask. (Our prayer must be that the Lord will take the masks off. We can't take them off because we don't even know what they are.) Then we have imputed righteousness, and our heart is flooded with his character-his love, patience, kindness, gentleness, and hunger for justice. We're set free. That's why when I'm on a plane now and people ask me what I do (I always remember the voice of that woman on the trip to Portland), I tell them about Jesus Christ, if they're interested. There's no way I'm going to wear that mask anymore! And there are others, but I'm turning to the Lord as he points each one out to me, and I encourage you to do the same.

When Jesus looks at us what does he see? I hope and pray it is a reflection of himself so that the men and women around us will have the opportunity to come into the kingdom of God because we are willing to live a life of godly transparency.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.
(Psalm 139:23-24)

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