

Beware Of Hypocrisy

A Sermon by Candidate David C. Roth

"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).

Beware: to be on one's guard. This is the definition which today's dictionary gives us for the word "beware." Our text taken from the gospel of Luke is an example of the Lord's urging His disciples to beware of something to beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. He gave this warning not only for the sake of His disciples, but as a message for all times, and one of high priority for all of us here today. The Lord is saying to all those who will listen, "Be on guard against a life of hypocrisy." He knows of its potential danger if not shunned. He knows it is especially dangerous to those who have acquired into their lives the goods and truths of His Word. He knows the sorry outcome of one who chooses to live a life of hypocrisy, and that is why He warns us. If any one of us were driving down the road and came upon a sign which said, "Danger, Bridge out," we would certainly stop, or at least slow down. In our text the Lord is holding up a similar warning sign. From a Divine concern for our eternal welfare He is giving us some important words of advice. When the Lord gives advice, it takes no more than common sense to realize that we should listen to it and heed it.

We first need to recognize that it is for our own good that He gives us this warning. For example, if a mother firmly or harshly yells at her son to get his immediate attention as a prevention against his harming himself, she is doing it out of love, not anger. She wants nothing more than his safe-keeping and happiness. She sees the danger and must do what she can to get his attention. The boy, on the other hand, may at first see this as an act of anger by his mother and may take offense, or feel he is being picked on. However, afterwards he can look back at the situation and see that there was great danger and that his mother yelled at him for his own good.

The Lord has to speak to us sometimes in the same way. He loves us all as His children and wants us to be happy. He knows the only true happiness awaits those who go to heaven. So in His Word He teaches

us the way to heaven. Sometimes His words seem harsh or unloving, even threatening, but this is only an outward appearance. As we know, the sayings in His Word, no matter how harsh, are all infilled with His unceasing love for our salvation.

In our text, as a matter of priority the Lord urgently warns His disciples to beware the leaven of the Pharisees because it could destroy them. It is one of the most grievous evils people of the church can commit, which in this case are His disciples. It could cost them as dear a price as an eternity spent in hell. He certainly does not want this for His disciples any more than He would wish it for any of us at this day. He knows it will bring only extreme unhappiness and bitter frustration.

But what is this hypocrisy which the Lord warns against? A good example of hypocrisy can be seen in the New Testament Word in the Lord's condemnation of the Pharisees. He accuses them of washing only the outside of the cup while leaving the inside full of extortion and self-indulgence. Then He compares them to "whitewashed tombs which appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt 23:27). By manipulating the laws of the Jewish Church to their own advantage they would devastate widows' estates by stealing all their money and property under the pretence of religious devotion. And further, by their holy and pious externals they would draw righteous young men into the work of the temple only to turn them out more evil than themselves. The Lord oftentimes referred to the Pharisees as hypocrites for these and many other reasons. As He said, "You outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt 23:28). He is teaching us that a hypocrite is one who purposefully deceives others, by hiding his own true character, a character of evil, behind a false front of good.

A hypocrite knows that what he is doing is evil. Since he wants no one to know of his evil, he hides it and deceives others into thinking that he is really very innocent. He hides it so that he is free to keep doing his evil, selfishly manipulating circumstances, and other people, all without hindrance of the law, or loss of honor, reputation, and gain. The hypocrite's whole life is possible by means of his ability to hide behind a facade of good appearances. Yet there is a certain sad irony to the life of a hypocrite. The irony is that while he is trying to deceive others, he actually ends up deceiving himself. Yet we can be certain of one thing: he is not deceiving the Lord. In the other life the Lord will take his facade away; then what is his gain? As the ancient writer Job asked,

"For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he may gain much, if God takes away his life?" (Job 27:8) And again, "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment" (Job 20:5).

It is true that hypocrites can harm others with their poisonous deceit, yet we find that the real danger of hypocrisy is to the hypocrites themselves. By a life of deceit they do great harm to their spiritual life. We are taught in the Writings that deceit is the one thing which can destroy our most precious and essential gift from the Lord our remains. Remains are those states of innocence, good affection, and powerful knowledge from the Lord's Word. They are implanted with us predominantly in infancy and childhood, and later become the incentive for us to regenerate. Without these we have no hope of regenerating; we have no power to regenerate. The hypocrite destroys these innocent states by dragging them down into his evil life as curtains of innocence to hide his evil intention. This mingling of innocence with guile completely destroys the regenerative power of his remains. The hypocrite, in effect, destroys the little child in himself. For remains serve in the formation of a spiritual conscience and a new will and understanding which can bring us into a new state of innocence. As is taught, "Unless you become as a little child, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Clearly the life of a hypocrite is a life which leads to hell. The hell of a hypocrite is one of terrible solitude, one of eternal isolation from others. In the other world they live in a dark and barren desert with jagged rocks and caverns, all alone. As is said in the book of Job, "The company of hypocrites will be barren" (Job 15:34). However, the hypocrite creates this situation for himself. Our true person is our spirit, and if we are always trying to hide it, then we will finally end up succeeding in the other life. We will end up alone, well hidden in dreadful isolation, forever deprived of the joy that relationships with others bring.

It is easy for us not to worry much about some future state which we may never find ourselves facing. But there is something happening right now which many people are not aware of. It is the reason for this irony mentioned in the situation of the hypocrite, and which might also be cause for fear right now. The fact is, a hypocrite cannot hide his evils from anyone in the entire spiritual world. At all times, including this very moment, spirits and angels can all know exactly what our spirit is thinking and willing in perfect view, as if in broad daylight. Listen to what the Writings say on the subject:

"Nothing whatever is hidden of that which a man in the world has thought, spoken, and done, but it is in the open, for it is these things which make [his] sphere. Such a sphere also pours forth from the spirit of a man while he is in the body in the world, and from this his quality is also known. Therefore believe not that the things a man 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" (AC 7454m emphasis added).

Nothing we ever say or do can possibly be hidden from the Lord. And as we have just noted, a person's thoughts and deeds are clearly shown in heaven. So then we need to ask ourselves, "What is being revealed about me right now that is being seen in the light or being proclaimed from the housetops?" Certainly we don't want to have all manner of evil thoughts and intentions broadcast in association with our spirit. This would definitely have ramifications similar to what we would experience here on earth if the same thing occurred. For example, if horrible and perverse words were constantly flowing from our mouths, any good people nearby would quickly take off, and hellish ones would rapidly gather as our companions. The same would happen with good and evil spirits around us in the spiritual world.

On the other hand, we can have good intentions and thoughts flowing from our spirit if we instead firmly shun hypocrisy and try to think and do what is good and true. It works both ways. Imagine the harsh reality of the hypocrite when he arrives in the other world and realizes that all the things that he thought he had successfully hidden from everybody in the world had been the daily news to angels and spirits there. The Writings teach that " ... nothing whatever is hidden, but that what a man inwardly thinks and plots is in the other life made manifest as in clear day" (AC 6214). And as the Lord warned in our text, "There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2).

In His exhortation to the disciples the Lord is not only warning us against the long-range possibility of hell itself, but is right now trying to keep us from the overwhelming embarrassment that could await us in the other world. We need to think about what we are doing, saying, thinking, and intending. For nothing we deliberately do is a secret not now, not ever. We can hide nothing. A good rule of thumb might be: if we wouldn't want certain emotions and thoughts broadcast over a loudspeaker, or any of our specific actions shown to the world on television, then we should not indulge in those emotions and thoughts or

perform those acts, because the truth of the matter is, those feelings, thoughts, and actions are being broadcast this way, even this very moment. "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."

Nonetheless, we can take comfort in the fact that the only thoughts which will be broadcast in association with our spirit are those thoughts which we have chosen to dwell on with delight, that is, those thoughts which we make our own. A conscientious and well disposed person should know that not every fleeting emotion or passing thought will be broadcast to our spiritual companions. We can also breathe a great sigh of relief knowing that after death the Lord will not reveal everything about our spirit. He will let only those things be revealed which will be of use to our spiritual progress. For example, what good would it do to reveal an evil someone has done and repented of? He has already repented so there is no use. That is why nothing we have done and have truly repented of will of necessity be disclosed after death.

While we are in this world, our spirit is always being literally bombarded with influences from both the good and the evil spirits which are with us. How many of us have had thoughts that we couldn't imagine we were even capable of having? When first stimulated, those thoughts were not our own, but we have the choice to make them so. Everything flows into us either from heaven or hell, and our life basically consists in choosing between accepting the good things or the bad things. Our basic humanity consisting of our free will to choose one or the other. We read, "Each and all things with man flow in according to his freedom evil from hell, and good from heaven, that is, through heaven from the Lord" (AC 6189).

If we heed the Lord's warning, and beware the leaven of the pharisees by shunning hypocrisy, then what do we have to fear? In this life we will not be trying to cover or hide our true self in the dark or in the inner rooms. We can confidently say, "Let my actions be brought to light and my sayings proclaimed on the housetops. I have nothing to hide." The confirmed hypocrite has much to fear, however not only the daily embarrassment and the disclosure of his character and deeds after death, but the fact that his eternal home will be an isolated eternity in the dark, barren wastelands of hell.

If we earnestly shun hypocrisy in our lives, and sincerely try to keep the deeds of our hands clean and the thoughts of our hearts pure, we will not have cause for daily fear, nor will we tremble when the veil is lifted in the next life to reveal our spiritual identity. Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 12:31-37; Luke 11:37-54, 12:1-3; AE 794:4