



Christianity in Real Life-Part 10

The Practical Value of Integrity

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Well, I got a little problem in my backyard I guess you should know about. I went out there the other day and needed to change a light bulb on the center post of a little deck that's off the back of my master bedroom. So if you walk out through the sliding door—sliding door on my kitchen—there are these three posts. And I've got a little backyard light on the middle post.

So I went out there to change it, got my little step stool out, got up on my step stool, light bulb in hand, ready to change the light bulb. And as I put my hand on the post up near the top of the post, my thumb went through the paint like a papier-mâché pole. I thought, "I didn't know that poles were papier-mâché." So then I took my finger and started poking around, and then I realized the post is rotted away.

Now the thing about the post is it really looks good. I painted it last summer. It really looks good. And I guess I tell you that because if you hear that I'm in the hospital or I've died because the deck collapses on me, now you'll know why. You'll say, "Well, Mike, you really should fix that." You're right, I should. And as soon as that happened, I thought, "Okay—'fix deck' needs to go on the list." But it's one of those projects; it's such a daunting project you don't even know where to start. What do you do? Is it going to cost to hire somebody? Who do you hire? What does this look like? I mean, I don't know.

I kept thinking, "It looks good. It looks so good. It just looks great." And you'd say, "Well, Mike, I don't care if it looks great." If you care about me, you might say this: "Mike, I don't care what it looks like. You know that the integrity of those poles holds up that deck, and if you don't care about that, you're in... I mean, at least don't let Carlin walk out on the deck." What you'd say to me is, "This is not safe. If you're going to dither and procrastinate, well then at least shut the deck down and don't walk underneath it—or fix it. It doesn't matter what it looks like."

That would be good advice. It'd be a great admonition. I should be very receptive to that. I should be. But of course, it's going to be a lot of work.

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn this morning to continue our study through the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6. And I want you to look at these words from Christ, which in essence are a good reminder for us that no matter what your life looks like to people, the integrity of your life is extremely important. So much is riding on the integrity of your life. And "integrity"—it is a biblical word. By the way, I think the ESV only translates it into English once. There's a good Greek word



that is the word for corruption and deterioration—something that is corrupt. Take that word in Greek, they put a little negation on the front of it, which is the Greek letter alpha—“a”—and that word translates into “integrity.”

There’s a great picture of my post—rotted. That’s why I thought of my post when I was studying this topic, because the idea of integrity is something that what it looks like on the outside is what it is on the inside: a nice sturdy post, a post that has intact structural integrity. That’s the idea.

Now I’m going to juxtapose that in contrast to what we see in this text. And the key word that we’ve already been looking at in the context of this part of the sermon is the word “hypocrite,” which, as I’ve said, is the idea *hupo-credo*—what you see on the surface; if you look under the surface you’d have a different opinion than if you looked on the outside. That’s *hupo-credo*. *Credo* means “to judge.” Your judgment—your assessment—would be different if you could look under the surface—*hupo-credo*. That’s the idea. Integrity is the opposite of that.

If you’ve noticed the subtitle for this morning’s message, what I want to do is try and pitch this in a positive direction and say, “What is the value of integrity?” We’ve already looked at the problem, if you will, of hypocrisy, and God’s not up on that; obviously he’s bagging on that in this passage. But if we look at this text, and we read it here in just a minute—we’re going to look at verses 41 and 42—I just want to consider this in these two verses: you know, what’s the good of having this? Now you can say, “Well, it’s good because it’s the right thing, and you should do the right thing.” But there’s something about this that God is concerned with, both explicitly—as it’s easy to see on the surface of the text—and implicitly—things that I think, if we just gave it some thought, we’d recognize there’s a great value in being a man or a woman of integrity.

Now, let me define it even further before we even read the text. If I’m going to put the word “integrity” out there and contrast that to the word “hypocrite,” I guess the way for us to spatially look at this is to look at the gap between the kind of Christian people think you are and the reality of the kind of Christian you really are—your reputation versus the reality of your character. The extent to which that gap exists and how far that gap is—if it’s a huge chasm—that’s the extent to which you are a hypocrite. And what we want to do is to narrow that gap. The goal of this sermon is to get that gap small if not gone, because what we want people to see is: if you say you’re a follower of Christ, well then if we looked at your life, you are following Christ, and you’re about righteousness and holiness; well, then in your life you’re pursuing righteousness and holiness. And that is the idea of closing that gap. We want the distance between your reputation and the reality of your character—what people think you are as a Christian and what you stand for, your creeds and your commitments and your resolves—to be the way you live your life.



Now, none of us are perfect—I get that—and none of us is claiming to be perfect. But we are claiming to be followers of Christ. And if we’re followers of Christ, we need to be following Christ. And so that gap we want to close. The difference is integrity versus hypocrisy.

Now, the illustration—we’ve got the larger context. Man, I hate to set this up so long, but here we go. We’ve understood—we started with “judge not, lest you be judged,” remember that? And we said, well, here’s one example of the wrong kind of judging: hypocritical judgment. So we’ve gotten the flow of this. I just want to focus on these verses. We’ve got the flow of thought and the argument, but let’s look at these finally.

Luke 6:41–42. Follow along with your eyeballs on your Bible as I read: “Why”—rhetorical question—“do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log”—you can see this is hyperbolic and even humorous; it’s crazy, you can’t have a log in your eye; if you were, you’d be dead—“the log that is in your own eye?” Matter of fact, the word is “beam” in Greek, which is the thing—and of course Galilean structures of the first century, much smaller than us—but if you look at the beams that run across this, actually the beams would be these two beams right here that hold up the trusses on a roof. That’s the idea of a beam. You can’t have that in your eye, but the humor of this is: you’ve got a big problem you’re not even seeing; you want to fix the problem of a speck in your brother’s eye, and that’s understandable. If you were out on the patio and you saw there was some speck in my eye, it would bother you. “You got something in your eye.” I hope you wouldn’t reach out and try and fix the problem, but you’d be concerned about the problem. And here’s someone concerned about some problem in his brother’s life; he’s got a bigger problem in his own life he’s not addressing.

Question, verse 42: “How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, 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.”

This is a picture of integrity. The opposite is hypocrisy. You’ve got a problem you’re not willing to address, but the standard that you’re employing in someone else’s life clearly is not applied in your own life. That’s hypocrisy. Double standard. Don’t practice what you preach. There are lots of things we could call this, but that’s the issue.

Okay. Let’s start with verse 41. Here’s an implicit observation—follow along with me here. “Why do you see the speck that’s in your brother’s eye, but you don’t notice the log that’s in your own?” You’d think, “Well, you do notice it; you should notice it.” Well, you’re disregarding it; you’re choosing to not notice it. But clearly, you know it’s there. All of us do. If we stopped to think about it, we would feel the hypocrisy if we just thought about it—particularly if you’re telling someone,



“Oh, you know what? You’ve got a problem. You really should pray more about that—how’s your prayer life going?” If I just stopped and thought, I would recognize, “You know what? Man, my prayer life is a mess. I’m hardly praying at all.” And I’d feel that if I just stopped and gave that some contemplation. The distance between what I want in other people’s lives—or the things that irritate me in other people’s lives—and I really just stop to think about it, there’s a conflict that should go on in my own heart.

Keep your finger here in Luke 6 and turn with me, if you would, to Romans 2, to give you a classic example of this and to inject a term into this discussion that will give us our first point this morning, and maybe something that we all desire—and we can fix the problem. We can fix the problem if we just deal with the issue of integrity; we move from hypocrisy to integrity.

Romans chapter 2—now just glance through this; we don’t have time to study this whole passage—but you can see, if you just even start in verse 1 and glance through, that we’re talking about hypocrisy, are we not? Someone passing judgment on someone else but not willing to see their own problem in their own life—same problem. And all this talk in the beginning of this chapter about, “Man, do you think you’re going to not be judged by God for the things that you’re willing to judge other people on? Come on.” Look at the hypocrisy—the word’s not used, but that’s clearly what’s going on here.

If you drop all the way down to verses 17 and following, you see the same thing: you’ve got people that are relying on the law, boasting in God, approving what’s excellent (verse 18). They think they’re instructed by the law, and because of that they can see what’s right and wrong. They’re a guide to the blind—or so they think—a light to those in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, because they have the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law. Then again the issue of hypocrisy, verse 21: “You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who preach against adultery, are you committing adultery?” This is the picture of hypocrisy—hypocrisy in the first part of the chapter; hypocrisy at the bottom. Now look in the middle.

Look in the middle of this text. Here in the middle of this text we’re reprising something we talked about in Romans 1. I don’t want to assume too much information that you know about Romans, but you might remember in the beginning of Romans, it talks about people that have been turned over by God to do evil things—God just kind of “Fine,” he’s thrown up his hands and said, “You want that? Take it.” But the Bible says no one gets to the place of moving headlong down into sin who does not—here’s the key phrase—*suppress the truth* in the pursuit of unrighteousness. In other words, when I do wrong, I have to fight something internally. And he defers to natural revelation: I can see in the world—the sunsets and the symmetry of the planets—I can see everything, and I think, “Well, there is God. He’s orderly, he’s prioritized, he does things beautifully.” I look at my own heart—it’s ugly, it’s chaotic. I should be able to know that if I’m living things in contrast or in rebellion to God’s law, there’s a conflict in my own life. And the only way I can continue to



maintain that is to keep pushing and stuffing that truth down in my heart. I learn to rationalize; I learn to justify myself. And then in chapter 2 he says, “Well, look—you still see the problem in other people’s lives, but you’re not seeing it in your own life.”

Now—middle of this, Romans chapter 2—look at verse 15, talking about those that have not had the advantage of sitting in Sabbath School learning the Torah—learning the law. He says even those people—that’s the “they” in verse 15—show that the work of the law—what’s right and wrong—is written on their hearts. Now here’s the key word I want to inject in this discussion: “while their conscience also bears witness.” It’s speaking up—their conflicting thoughts. This is what conscience does: it either accuses them when they do wrong or excuses them when they recognize, “You know what, I did the right thing there.” “On that day”—we’re going to see all that come to the surface—“when, according to my gospel” (Paul’s gospel), God judges the secrets—there’s the domain of this; it’s going on in my heart, you can’t see it—of men by Christ Jesus. That’s going to be exposed.

In other words, the times that I’ve done wrong there’s always been an internal conflict. That was a lot to finally get to the first point. But when I look at your life and say, “Man, you shouldn’t have an outburst like that. Man, that guy sure is self-promoting. Man, that person really doesn’t know much about whatever and shouldn’t speak to that if he doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” and I am—in regard to my own life—not doing the things that I’m saying to other people, I’m not holding myself to the same standard I hold other people to—if I really took the veneer off of my life and looked to the secrets of my heart, there would be a battle going on, because I have a thing called a conscience.

Number one on your outline: if I can close the gap between what I expect from you and what I do in my own life—what I expect from me; the standard I hold you to and the standard I hold myself to—if I become a man of integrity, here’s what I get to enjoy: **I get to live with a clear conscience.** See, and that’s what I would exhort all of you to want—to desire and to make your aim.

In the discussion questions this week—you’ll look on the back, and hopefully you’ll go to a home fellowship group and discuss these things—you’ll find verses that I’ve added there, and I’ve just added a sampling of them of how the Bible puts conscience up here as a top priority for you: to keep a clear conscience. I give you the Acts 24 passage there that says—Paul says—“I take great pains to have a clear conscience.” I don’t want my conscience accusing me for what I say or what I do or what I think; I don’t want that internal conflict. And when I am a hypocrite, I’m fighting a battle in my conscience. I have to suppress that voice of conscience and say, “Stop, stop, stop,” and somehow fight in my own heart what’s going on.



All I'm saying is there's a great thing about you pursuing godliness and doing what the Bible asks you to do. What happens is you begin to live life with this inner peace, where your conscience now excuses you—it gives you a sense of affirmation; it gives you a sense that "I'm doing the right thing." Integrity, in a way, is its own gift—at least in part—because it allows you to live life with a sense of "I have a clear conscience. I know I'm doing the right thing." Now, that's the goal of you holding yourself to the same standard you hold other people to—when you see them violating God's Word, you hold yourself to that same criteria and say, "I need to make sure that I'm doing what I expect of other people." That's integrity.

Here's the problem, though, when I bring up the topic of conscience—let me sidebar here for just a couple minutes. Conscience in the Bible, though it's always held up as something very important that you should always seek to not violate—your conscience, the Bible will make clear, is not foolproof. It is not something that is always going to be right. As a matter of fact, your conscience can somehow be conditioned to lead you astray.

Let me give you the two words that the Bible uses about the problem your conscience can have. Number one: it can be **stained**. "Stained"—I think sometimes the ESV translates it "defiled." It's the word used in Greek to dip something—like a fabric—into a dye. Titus 1:15 puts it that way: people can have a defiled, or a stained—or some translations call it a polluted—conscience. If you're going to try and match some paint—or paint, I don't know, your post in your backyard—and you go and get a paint chip from Home Depot or whatever, you want that paint chip—if it says, "Here it is, Navajo White," or whatever—you want that paint chip to accurately reflect the paint that's in the bucket that you're going to go back and buy. You want those two to match. The Bible says that your conscience is that paint chip. And as you go home and try to match it up and say, "Yeah, this is the paint I need. This is the paint that matches," if it's not an accurate reflection of what's in the paint can, then it's not a very good guide to knowing what's right and wrong. It can be stained; it can get dirty; it can change its appearance to where now the standard of conscience really isn't working very well. "Stained" is a helpful word; it's a vivid word, an illustrative word to talk about the problem with conscience.

In other words, if you want to keep fighting—in your own conscience—things that you know are wrong, and you keep saying, "No, I'm going to justify, rationalize—there's a reason... I'm not holding people... I'm holding myself to a different standard than I expect of other people," if you keep doing that in your life, you can get to the place where your conscience no longer bothers you because it's been stained. You keep holding up your conscience; it doesn't reflect truth anymore. It's now just kind of been tailored to your own preferences.

Let me give you another word. It's the word that is translated, for instance, in 1 Timothy 4:2—it's translated in the ESV, the English Standard Version, as **seared**. But let me give you the Greek word which is transliterated into our English language, and it may be helpful. "Transliterated"—you know what that means: not translated; transliterated. If we're translating the word in Greek, it turns



out to be “seared.” If we’re going to transliterate it, you’d find—if you look in the Greek New Testament and then in our English language—you’d find a word that corresponds with almost every letter. It’s the word **to cauterize**. Does that sound like a familiar word to you? To cauterize.

When I was a little kid, I had bloody noses all the time—anybody with me on that? I met people on the patio; you don’t have to raise your hands. It’s—you know—I guess it gets you acquainted with blood so you don’t freak out. But as a kid, you know, Mom was tired of washing and bleaching all my pillowcases because I had bloody noses all the time. Why? Because I had blood vessels on the surface of my nose that were so close to the surface and so sensitive—if you came up to me as an eight-year-old, took your finger and pushed my nose like this, and then stepped back, I would have—this is a gross illustration—blood coming down my face. That’s a problem. I need that fixed. The way to get it fixed is to cauterize your blood vessels in the interior of your nose or nasal passage. So it’s not a very pleasant appointment, by the way, with the doctor. There are a couple ways to do it—there’s a chemical cauterization; there’s an electro, you know, heat cauterization. There are different ways to do it, but it still hurts and it’s not a lot of fun. But what they do is they take something—in my case, I’ve done it with the electric probe; it sounds terrible—but they put this probe up your nose—this is a terrible illustration, I realize, and anything up your nose—if that’s used in a sermon illustration, probably not a good one. They put the probe up your nose and they burn those vessels, and they call it cauterization. And those vessels get so seared by the heat of that probe that then all the scar tissue grows over it. Now, if you come up to me on the patio and you put your finger on my nose like I just did—look, no blood. How does that work? All those vessels have been seared. They’ve been cauterized.

Now, that’s your conscience. It’s designed so that when you bump into transgression—you entertain thoughts you should not entertain, you say things in a small group you shouldn’t say because it’s really gossip—and you do those things and you bump up, and then you should have the blood—this is terrible—the guilt should be coming, flowing out. You feel guilty—that’s your conscience. The Bible says here’s the thing: you keep sinning, you will cauterize your conscience; you will sear it to where now, when you bump into gossip or lust or whatever it might be in your life, you’ve become so adept at suppressing the truth in unrighteous behavior that now you can bump into things that are sinful and you don’t even—there’s no guilt gushing out. That may be a weird illustration, but you’ll remember it.

So what’s the point? I want a sensitive conscience. I want to make sure that when I do right, then there’s no guilt; when I do wrong, there should be guilt. How do I keep my conscience from being seared or stained? Here’s how—Hebrews chapter 5. I’m glad you asked. One more passage before we leave this point. You and I should aim to live with a clear conscience. To do that I want to close the gap between what I say I stand for and what I really do in my life. Well, my conscience is going to be a guide in a lot of this—not the end all—and here’s how we know we can have a healthy conscience.

Verse 13—Hebrews 5:13: “For everyone who lives on milk”—talking about Christians now in this church that the writer of Hebrews is addressing—milk now is analogized as someone who is “unskilled in the word of righteousness.” If you want really more what “milk” is defined as, you can draw a little line in the margin down to chapter 6 when it talks about the elementary principles of Christ. They’re the basics; they’re the “Jesus loves you”—isn’t it great? “Jesus died for you”—isn’t it great that we should repent of our sins and become Christians and be justified? All of those are great truths, and we love them, and they’re fantastic; they’re important, and we tell every non-Christian these truths, but they’re the elementary principles of Christ. They’re the things that you should move from—as he says in chapter 6, “leaving them behind.” Doesn’t mean we forget them, but we move into ingesting what he’s now going to call “the meat of the word.”

If you’re just imbibing on your 13 favorite verses all the time—reading your one-page devotional—as long as it doesn’t challenge you and it just says the same things you hear every morning from your little printed devotional, well then you’re a child. Verse 14—you’re just a baby Christian. “But solid food”—which, if you look back in this passage, was analogous to this discussion he wanted to have about Melchizedek and the Melchizedekian priesthood, but they don’t even really know the Scriptures; they don’t even know the principles; they’re not even interested in the correlations of Melchizedek and Christ—so they’re unskilled. “If they were able to ingest that solid food”—well, “that’s for the mature.” Note this in light of our discussion about conscience—here it comes, middle of verse 14: “for those who have their powers of discernment trained”—there is something analogous to conscience; the ability of me—my mind, my heart—to perceive accurately—“by constant practice.” I keep getting the breadth of God’s Word—that’s why we do the daily Bible reading—and the depth of God’s Word—that’s why we do this thing called “TAN” at the church (which sounds so bad for Southern California to call it that), but that’s our depth of Bible study—then always now, principles of getting historical, grammatical, literary context, going in for principles, and all the way down to application: the depth of God’s Word and the breadth of God’s Word. If that is your practice, that practice allows that distinguishing—powers of distinguishing things—or discerning things. It allows you now to separate in your own mind—clearly—good from evil.

You want your powers of discernment trained—aka your conscience—then you’ve got to be constantly taking in more than your 13 favorite Bible verses. You should feel right now a little bit of guilt, I hope—with a sensitive conscience—if you’re not reading through the Bible continually; if you’re not getting into the depth of one particular passage regularly and moving to the next and the next and the next. If you don’t have the breadth and the depth of God’s Word, you’re never going to have a conscience that’s really responsive to the truth. Your conscience is going to be white noise. We want a conscience that’s sensitive, and we want one that constantly cheers us on for doing the right thing and makes us feel guilty when we do the wrong thing.

You want to live with a conscience that doesn’t accuse you and only affirms your behavior? Keep on closing the gap between the reputation of the things you say you stand for and the way you actually live your life. Close the gap. The bigger the gap, the more of a hypocrite we are. The smaller the gap, the more of a man or a woman of integrity that we are. Conscience—wonderful



benefit. Integrity is its own reward: we get a clear conscience. Much more we could say on that, and perhaps you can go through the discussion questions and dig a little deeper on some of those questions and passages that deal with conscience. Great.

Back to our text—Luke chapter 6. I want a clear conscience—being someone that doesn't reach out to fix the speck in someone else's eye because there's a log hanging out of my own. I realize there's an issue in my own life I've got to deal with. That's fantastic. I can close the gap on reputation and reality.

Verse 42: "How in the world can you help your brother—say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye'—if you don't see the log in your own? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye." You know what that spells? Practicing what I preach. I'm about to say, "You ought to fix that in your life," and I'm closing the gap. I'm now becoming a man of integrity when I take those things—before I say, "Hey, you should be praying about that," I'm praying about issues in my life. There's consistency. There's integrity. When I do that, now I can see clearly—which is a reference back to verse 39. The problem with their leaders is they were the blind leading the blind. I want clear sight. How do I have that? I'm a person of integrity. Now I can reach out, and I see the problem in your life and I can help you with it. I can take the speck that's out of your brother's eye. That's what I want to do.

That may be something you say, "I don't want to do." No, no—you have no choice. That's what we're all called to do: to help and encourage one another. This is called ministry because we're serving other people. Ministry is not making sure that I'm just living a good Christian life. That's just taking care of your spiritual growth. The Bible says ministry, of which we should all be a part, is when I take a real sincere interest in someone else's spiritual life. And if something in their life is out of whack, I want to help you fix it. If you're struggling with concerns about this issue, I'm going to help you with that. If you're falling into temptation here, I want to help get you out of it. If you stumbled, I want to restore you. That's the kind of interaction the church requires. And if you close the gap between what you say you're about and what you really are, the Bible then promises this: you'll be much more effective in ministry—not only that, you'll have more of it.

Number two on your outline—let's put it down that way: we need to recognize that, as someone of integrity, you can anticipate **more effective ministry**. Real, effective ministry.

And I've got to sidebar this for a while too, because some of you think, "I don't want to be involved in anybody else's life." I've already said it, but—tough. If you are a Christian, you're going to have to be involved. Now, a lot of people quote Hebrews 10 when we try to tell each other, "Well, you really should go to church and hear the pastor yak for an hour at church." And you know the passage I'm talking about—"don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of



some,” but you ought to be gathering together all the more as you see the Day approaching. But what we miss in that is what the directive of the text is. The directive of the text isn’t “Go sit with your chairs side-by-side and listen to the preacher yakking at you”—although you should do that. It is that you ought to—here’s how it says—you ought to **consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds**. That’s the requirement of every Christian—and all the more as you see the Day approaching—is that you should be thinking, “How can I help this person in my church love God, love people more, and do more good deeds,” which necessarily implies doing less bad deeds. I want to be helpful in that regard. That way, if I see a speck in their eye, I am called—and I recognize my calling—to get it out and help them get it out.

You may be the kind of Christian that always just wants to come in with chairs side-by-side, listen to someone yak, get up, go away, come back seven days later, and do it all again. That’s not church. If you’re a once-a-week participant in a church, you’re really not a participant in the church. You need to be involved in some other stage or level of life in the church where your chairs are **face-to-face**, and you’re helping each other.

Now let me explain the word “stir”—*stir, stir*—what does that look like? Well, you get your coffee, put a stir stick in, and you stir it. That doesn’t sound so bad—unless you’re the coffee, and you’re fine just being placid and calm, and then it’s like, “I don’t want—I don’t like that.” But it doesn’t have the teeth that the word in Greek really has. In the Greek New Testament the word can be translated—and sometimes is—“to **provoke**.” That’s the old translations—“to provoke one another.” Now that doesn’t sound good at all. “I don’t want to provoke anybody.” Now, this is provoking them to good, but it’s still provoking. Here’s another way you could translate it—look it up in a lexicon: **irritate**. “I really don’t want to irritate anybody.” No—but it’s irritating them **for good**.

I want you to think about it this way: the church is all about you being in relationships that are frankly **irritating one another to love and good deeds**—to loving people, loving God, doing more good deeds, more, and less bad deeds. This is why some people don’t like this church. They’ll call us legalists or whatever they want to call us because they don’t want anybody putting a finger in their lives and taking the specks out of their eyes. They don’t like that. That’s the calling of the church. Everyone is required to be in relationships where that happens—as irritating as that is. And what we say is because the goal is good, this should be something understandable that we should all want. We want to have iron sharpening iron in the church.

If you want to see the difference between Christians that view church the right way and Christians that view church the wrong way, you can just think about the gym. You know, some of you go to the gym—I can tell. You go to the gym. When you go to the gym, there are two kinds of people at the gym: people that go there, get on their machine, when they get tired and they don’t want to do anymore they get off the machine and go home. Category A—that’s participation in the gym. That’s like a lot of people in our church right now. There’s a second kind of person that realizes what they

really need is someone to **irritate** them to good health. So they hire someone—in a red shirt—to come around and irritate them for an hour while they’re at the gym. When they get tired and want to get off the machine, the guy with the red shirt and the clipboard says, “No, no, no, no—you’re not done yet. Keep going, keep going, keep going—just come on—two more minutes.” Or they’re on the weights—“Come on, five more, you can do it.” “No, I’m done.” “No, no, no—you’re not done. Keep going.” They **pay** for that irritation. You realize they pay someone to irritate them. And it goes beyond that. I can only imagine—now, I can never hear them; I’ve got my headphones on—and I’m watching these poor people being irritated, because when I’m tired I’m done. I get off, I go home. They get irritated and are told “No.” I can only imagine the things on the clipboard. I mean, I’m assuming—and I don’t know, and don’t tell me; I don’t want to know—but it probably gets into real invasive things like, “So what did you eat this week?”

Now, here’s the deal. If I go to the gym and I’m on the machine, and the guy next to me says, “Well, what did you have for breakfast this morning?” I’m like, “Get out of my business, man. None of your business.” And if I start to get off, he goes, “No, no—get back on, get back on.” Like—“You don’t have a red shirt. You don’t work here. I didn’t hire you to tell me when to stop. Get out of my business.” Now that’s how most people view modern church—why people—some people—don’t like this, or they come here and they recognize that we’re trying to live biblically, which means we’re going to be in each other’s lives, and we’re going to be in groups where chairs get face-to-face, and we **provoke** one another to love and good deeds. That’s your job. And you’re not going to do that job very well if you are a hypocrite.

Let me tell you about a hypocrite at the gym. I should be careful with this because some of you know where I go. But there’s a guy there I’ve noticed with a red shirt that barely fits him, because he’s apparently—man—big. And it’s not a thyroid problem or anything because I watch him. I’ve seen him outside the back of the gym sitting there with a big gigantic bag of food, pounding down his food—and it isn’t, like, from the health food store. Now, he’s a big boy and his shirt probably goes to right here. He’s just big. And—you talk about hypocrisy—well, if you looked at him, he’s bigger than I am. He’s a fat boy. Not only that, I’ve seen him pounding the hamburgers behind the back in the parking lot, sitting on the little curb. I’ve actually seen what he’s done with meals. As I’ve pulled up to the gym, he’s out there **smoking**. He’s wearing the gym shirt saying, “Oh, I work for the gym.”

Now, if he walks through the gym and dares to tell me to stay on the machine five minutes more, or “What did you have for breakfast?”—I’m going to say, “Get stinking out of my face, man. You have no right to tell me that, you smoking, overweight hypocrite.” That’s pretty harsh. I’m sorry. I wouldn’t say that—I would just think it. But I’m thinking to myself, do you see the breakdown in all of this when you don’t practice what you preach? Now, I’m assuming he’s a mechanic or something and fixes things when they break, because he can’t possibly be a trainer. I’ve never seen him do that. But I think—hey, it’s his own fault. But anyway, he’s got a free gym membership, I’m assuming.

That's the point. If—and I want to talk about two levels of this—in my life, I really want to be used by God as I ought to, because it's my job to be in relationships where I'm really provoking, stirring someone on to being more godly—loving God more, loving people more, doing less bad deeds, doing more good deeds. If that's part of my job, and that's what I want to be used to do for the glory of God and for the good of what God has called me to do, then I've got to make sure I'm doing the things that I'm asking other people to do. I cannot be a hypocrite because I can never have effective ministry that way. It will be obvious—when I say, “Well, thanks for sharing about your loss of temper this week,” and “You should...”—if he knows that I don't control my temper and I have no self-control, then how in the world is he going to listen to anything I'm going to say? So that's just a normal, observable barrier to any effective ministry. You've got that—that's easy to understand; I illustrated it.

There's an almost intangible part of this that some of you—if you follow me now—you know the difference. It's often put under the rubric of the word **authority**. When Jesus taught, they said, “Here's one who's preaching with authority,” and the distinction was often the scribes. They taught things, but they didn't practice what they preached—Matthew 23:1–2 says. So Jesus comes on the scene with integrity, and one of the words they use is “He teaches with authority.” There is something about you hearing from someone else, “Listen, you ought to do this; you shouldn't do that”—counseling you to do something in your Christian life—that has that intangible quality of the authority of a life that is godly; that is—I was going to use the word “reputable,” and I get that from **Acts**.

Matter of fact, if you want a homework assignment—which you may not, but maybe you do—Acts 6 and 7 introduce us to a guy named **Stephen**. At the beginning of chapter 6, the apostles are being inundated with all kinds of tasks, and they make the decision to have seven people picked in Acts 6 who are going to serve the tables. And they said three criteria: pick men of **good repute**, full of **wisdom**, and **the Spirit**. Okay, and think this through: good repute—got a good reputation; people think well of them; this guy's solid. Full of wisdom—he knows the Word; he knows how to live life; he knows how to apply the Scripture. And the Spirit—he's walking with the Spirit; he's a man of integrity. He goes in and starts doing ministry beyond waiting on tables and starts to tell people what they ought to do to be obedient to Christ. Part of that is evangelism—he's telling non-Christians how to be saved.

The Bible says in that passage—both the end of chapter 6 and chapter 7—that as he does that, people don't like what he says, and they don't have anything to hang on this guy. It's like Daniel—they have nothing bad to say. So they revert to having to **make up** bad things to say about him. They begin to lie about him because they don't want to hear what he has to say. They know this, though, intuitively: this guy comes with that kind of **gravitas**, that kind of power, that kind of **authority** in his preaching, because he's a man who practices what he preaches. He's a man of integrity. It has such an effect on people that they don't just shrug their shoulders and walk by. It's the kind of speech—it's the kind of instruction; it's the kind of admonition or exhortation—that has such power you can't ignore it. One of my favorite passages in all of that description in the narrative is Acts 6:10. It says they **could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he**



was speaking. It's a "spirit"—and I think you have to make a decision about capital "S" or small "s," but I think it may be small "s," even though the ESV gives a capital "S." We're not just talking about the Spirit of God; we're talking about the fact that his spirit was a spirit that's in sync with the Holy Spirit. That's a spirit that's integrous—that's doing what the Bible says.

Now think about that. There was something about the impact of his words. Now, you know the difference, haven't you? You've been on the receiving end of some instruction, some encouragement, some counsel from a person that—there was just that element missing; there wasn't that authority, that power; there wasn't that influence or the impact as another person, and you're not sure why. Often here's the difference: **integrity**. Often it's that intangible thing; it's not that I can see that there's integrity or hypocrisy; it's just that there's some power in that. And I'm telling you: when you close the gap between reputation and the reality of your character, the more your words will have impact. And the Bible says that all over the place—the impact of a godly life. There's something about that—you just—it equals effective ministry. You counsel, you encourage, you help someone through a hard time—the power of your words—they come from integrity in part.

Now, let me turn you here real quick—2 Timothy chapter 2. The way I worded my point was not just that you'll have effective ministry, but you'll have **more** of it. Now, again, you have no way out of this. This is our job description: to stimulate, encourage, stir up one another to love and good deeds. So that's my job—whether you're the preacher and have a microphone on your head or not, that's your job. Now, as you seek to do that, you'll have scheduled times to do that, but I'll tell you this: most effective ministry takes place in the **unscheduled** times. Have you noticed that? Not on my calendar; it's not a Bible study; it's not a home fellowship group; it's not a discipleship meeting. It's just "God, use me today to help someone love God or love people or do more good deeds and less bad deeds." How did that work? Here's how it works.

2 Timothy 2:20: "Now in a great house"—here's the illustration—"there are not only vessels of gold and silver"—you can picture that—vessels there on the mantel or on the coffee table; these are important vessels—"but also of wood and clay"—you've got some for honorable use—that's the gold and silver ones—and you've got some for dishonorable use—they're just boxes; they're just for various things—wood and clay. "Therefore, if anyone"—speaking now to the Christians—you and me—"cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, then he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy"—that word: different, distinct. Love this—my favorite phrase in this passage—"**useful to the Master** of the house." That's what I'd like to be. Master of the house—clearly God. God wants to do ministry in his church. He's going to pick people from the tool chest of this church to work in the lives of other people. Someone over here is discouraged; someone just lost their parent over here; someone going through a trial; somebody falling into sin over here. God wants to rearrange the people in this church to impact other people. Who's he going to choose to have that quote-unquote serendipitous meeting at Starbucks or have that encounter with them or talk to them on the patio—I just happen to be standing there—and offer encouragement in that situation? It will be people that he picks from the toolbox that are—look at it, verse 21—who are cleansed from dishonorable things and now **useful to the Master and ready for every good work**.



Are you ready? You will have **more ministry** in your life that you didn't even plan if you close the gap between your reputation—what you say you're all about—and who you really are. Closing the gap—God goes to his tool chest; he has a need in the church; he'll pick you up and utilize you.

"Therefore"—verse 22—"flee"—repent; turn around; run from—"youthful passions"—you've got to run after and **pursue righteousness and faith and love and peace**, along with those—back to the first point—who call on the Lord **from a pure heart**. A clear conscience—who don't have that internal conflict; they're not covering up and suppressing the truth; they don't have the heavy hand of God upon them as they run from their sin. They're honest; there's—in whose spirit there is no deceit. Pure conscience. The perfect Christian is not perfect, but when they fall into sin—when there's a problem—we fix it. Those are the people God reaches into the toolbox to use. And all I've got to say is that that's all that will matter a hundred years from now. Think this through: that's all that will matter a hundred years from now when it comes to how your Christian life is evaluated. God is not going to review your life and say, "Well, man, how cool were your vacations?" Not going to say that. "Did you get to travel a lot? What was your body-fat percentage?" He won't care. "Did you die with a lot of wrinkles? How did you look?" God will not care about any of that. As the old hymn says, what will matter is what you did for him. And what he wants done is often a focus on his bride, the church, and he wants **you** to be utilized to minister to them. Sometimes it's taking the speck out of their eye; sometimes it's putting that cloak around them and caring for them—whatever the need of his bride is, he wants to utilize you. How can you do that? Close the gap—more integrity, less hypocrisy. That's it. "Then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." And I guarantee you: God's going to put your face-to-face with people that need your assistance. Anticipate more effective ministry.

Lastly, back to our text—verse 42, Luke 6—printed on your worksheet. We looked at the scenario in verse 42—someone who wants to take the speck out of his eye; can't do it with a log; got to take the log out. Then you can see in the middle of that are two words—**you hypocrite**. You can see the breakdown on your worksheet, can you not? We look at the beginning of verse 42 and the bottom of verse 42—that's A and C. Now we're going to look at B, the middle of verse 42: "You hypocrite."

Now, some of you see that word and immediately you take it and throw it in a category. You say, "I know how Jesus spoke about hypocrites—it was those lost people; those people that were, as he says in Matthew 23, the 'sons of hell'—the hypocrites—scribes and Pharisees; and when they made a proselyte, they made the proselyte—the disciple—twice as much a son of hell as themselves. I know who the hypocrites are: they're the non-Christians, the lost people—those are God's enemies." Stop with that. Now, think this context—is that the context here? If you take the word "hypocrite" every time you read it in the Bible and think, "Oh, I know who we're talking about—non-Christians," that's wrong. Look at this context—verse 42: these are people that want to **help their brothers**; they just have too much of a hypocritical gap in their lives to be effective. They need to close the gap by getting the log out of their eye, and then they can help their brother. I



mean, we started with the “brother” terminology in verse 41. We’re talking about people that are brothers. In the middle of that he says, “You hypocrite.”

Now, here’s the thing: the word “hypocrite” can apply to non-Christians, obviously—and the Pharisees were classic non-Christians, and they were sons of hell, I get that. God uses this phrase as well for people who are his people—who are brothers, people that are his children. You can earn the phrase “you hypocrite.” Now, how do you get rid of it? Verse 42—bottom of the verse: **take the log out of your eye**—close the gap between reputation and reality. Stop being a hypocrite and start being a man or woman of integrity, and you won’t earn the phrase “you hypocrite” from God.

What does that do? That **improves your relationship with God**. Would you jot that down—**number three**: you be a man of integrity, a woman—you will enjoy a better relationship with God.

Now, just as you write that down, some of you are saying, “Ah, you hypocrite—you don’t know the Bible.” I don’t think so. I think I know the Bible on this point. Matter of fact, I think what you’ve done is maybe bought into a modern stream of theology that is abhorrent. It is a modern stream of theology that takes biblical truths and applies them in an unbiblical way—takes biblical truths and applies them in unbiblical ways. People out there today—very popular—you read all the cool blogs, I get that; all the Christian blogs, all the luminaries of modern Christianity—and they’re all saying this to you: “You couldn’t be loved any more than you are; you couldn’t have a—You don’t get graded by God because you’re graded in Christ; you’re wrapped in union with Christ; your report card with God says straight A’s.” Now listen, there’s some truth to some of this. If we’re talking about **justification**, you couldn’t be any more loved. If we’re talking about the covenant relationship of you being his child—you are accepted in Christ because of the work of Christ; you are identified with Christ; you are in Christ—I get that. But if you now want to look at what the Bible says about your **walk** with Christ—don’t tell me every report card in the room is an A.

People say, “Well, God is looking at me, but all he sees is Christ.” This is making a resurgence. It’s a recurring heretical view of sanctification, and it continually comes around in church history, and we’re in the middle of it right now. The cool guys—the Christian luminaries of our day—are constantly spewing this stuff. They’ll say it that way: “Your report card—straight A’s. How did you get that? Christ earned it for you.” Trust me, when God looks at some of his children, he says this: **“You hypocrite.”** Tell me how your report card looks. And when he calls you a hypocrite—**not real good**. How’s your relationship with God at that point? **Not real great.**

“Well, I don’t know—maybe you’re misapplying all this.” Listen—in Matthew 16, when Peter starts to put his focus on earthly things and not on the things of God, and he starts saying things to Jesus, Jesus turns to him and says, “Hey, Peter, get behind me...” You know the next word—“Beloved”? That was right—because all I see when I look at you is my own righteousness. “Love

you, Peter.” That’s what he says? No—he says, “**Get behind me, Satan.**” Now, do you think that the covenant relationship of God’s forgiveness was on Peter? Yes. Do you think he accepted him as his own? Yes—constantly reiterating that when he said things like—“Wash me”—“No, listen, you’re already clean.” He said that to Peter. At the end of his ministry he proved that even in his failures. He said, “Listen, I’ve got a future for you. Repent; get back in the game. Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Do you love me? Tend my lambs.” I get that—Jesus is committed to Peter. But at some point, when Peter starts putting his focus on earthly things and not the things of God, Jesus says, “Get behind me, **Satan.**” What does “Satan” mean? You know that word: *Satan* in Hebrew; *satanas* in Greek; “Satan” in English—it’s all transliterated back from the Hebrew; it means **adversary**—you’re opposing.

Now—how’s your report card when Jesus says, “Hey, Bob, Bill, Susan—get behind me, Satan”? I think you’re not scoring so good that day. I think your relationship with God could be better—don’t you think so? I don’t know; I think so—he just called you “Satan.” He just called you “adversary.”

If you want to buy the nonsense that says everything in your Christian life is straight A’s because you’re all wrapped in Jesus, you’ve missed the whole point of much of the New Testament. You want report cards? Go to **Revelation 2–3** and look—does he look at his church and do they all get straight A’s because they’re all found in Christ? No. A couple churches do pretty well; sometimes they do really poorly. And this is the problem with the word “love”—you often think love is some feeling. How do you think Jesus “felt” about the Christians at **Laodicea**? He said, “You make me **sick**,” did he not? This was his church. “If you don’t repent, I’m going to come and snuff this church out.” Their report card wasn’t very good.

When Jesus looks at the Christians through the pen of James when he speaks to them in **James 4**, he says the problem with you is you’re becoming so **worldly**—much like Peter putting his mind on the things of the world. He says, “You know friendship with the world is hostility toward God.” And then he calls them a name—talk about name-calling—“You **adulteresses.**” How’s your relationship with God the day he calls you an “adulteress” because you’re too worldly? I’m thinking you’re not doing so well—I’m saying **D, D-minus**. This is a bad day in your relationship with God. And you know what he says? Here’s another thing that might help you. We see this all throughout the New Testament as well as the Old. He says at the end of that exhortation—what do you do? **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.** What does that imply? That in their worldliness as a church God was **not** near to them. He says, “You adulteresses”—you’re in a relationship with me, but you’re pandering to the world—repent. Here’s how it’s put—how do I fix the problem? How do I draw near to God? “**Cleanse your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded.**” What does that mean? **Hypocrites.** You say you love me; you say you’re for me, but you’re living a life that’s denying me; you’re living a life that’s compromising; you’re living a life that’s in concert with the world. Listen—you’ve got to be holy.

“Adulteresses.” “You make me sick.” “Get behind me, Satan.” “You hypocrites.” All I’m saying is we ought to have a concern as to **how our relationship is with God**. And I guarantee you: the extent to which there’s a gap between what you claim and what you say you’re about and how you actually live your lives is the extent to which you don’t have a great relationship with God. I can look at my kids and say, “I’m not kicking you out, I’m not sending you to a foster home, I’m not sending you to Mexico and disowning you,” but you know what—even in that covenant commitment that underlies my relationship with my children—trust me, **you can displease me today**, and we can be having a bad relationship this afternoon. I’m not sending you into outer darkness where there’s weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth; you don’t have to fear the lake of fire. But there may be some tears tonight because of how you’re living.

You may be committed to marriage—“I’m a Christian guy; divorce is not in our vocabulary.” That’s fantastic—I understand that; that’s like equating our life with Christ to justification, I get that. But now the question is, **How’s your marriage?** How you doing? How’s the relationship? How’s the intimacy? How’s the connection between the two of you? You do understand there’s room for **improvement** in your relationship with God. All I’m doing is equating this: the gap between reputation and reality—the distance between hypocrisy and integrity—that is the distance between me and God. That’s the problem. I don’t want God calling me an “adulteress,” a “hypocrite,” as his child. It can happen; it happens all throughout the New Testament.

So I long for that relationship with God—how do I get it? One passage—last one—we’ll end with it: **2 Corinthians 6**. If I’m a man of integrity, I can enjoy a better relationship with God. How do I get it? Well, we’ve already seen it—take the log out of your eye; repent. He says, “Purify your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded.” Here’s another way to put it. You want the action step? You **jettison the hypocritical alliance with sin**. You jettison the hypocritical alliance with sin. And that’s the imagery of this passage.

2 Corinthians 6:14—let’s start there. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” If you’re in lockstep with the world and its values, and that’s your “yoke”—how in the world can you say that’s possible? “Yoke” is not the egg, right? It’s the thing over the back of the ugly oxen as they pull the plow. You’re in lockstep with non-Christians and their lives and their values. He says this: “For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?” That was the problem in James 4—they tried to find a lot of partnership there, but it didn’t work. “What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Satan? What portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” Why are we acting so worldly? Why is there a gap between what we claim to be and what we really are? That’s hypocrisy—that’s a hypocritical alliance with sin.

And then—you know the Bible—we go from prose (look at your Bible) to poetry. You see all the white spaces now as he starts to quote some things, and if you’re good with your Bible, you look at the little footnotes and you say, “Well, where’s this quotation coming from?” And a lot of times

we'll have one passage and it's from Isaiah—whatever—and there it is. **This is from all over**—he starts grabbing phrases and ideas and concepts from all over the Old Testament, and he says, “Man, just as God said,” and then he says this: **“I will make my dwelling”**—there's a word of relationship—**“among them; I will walk among them”**—that's a term of our intimacy, our relationship—**“I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”** That may be the foundational covenant contract we have with God—I get that. But the focus here is on **How is your relationship with God?** Hey, if you want to see him dwelling among us, walking among us, being in harmony—in sync with us—as James says, as Paul says in Galatians, “in step with the Spirit”—if you want that, he says, then this—verse 17: **“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will”**—word of relationship here—**“welcome you; and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me,”** says the Lord Almighty.

This is not about justification. This is about the **intimacy of sanctification** for those who are men and women of integrity. I know that because of 7:1—“Since we have these promises,” what promises? Well, it started in 6:16—dwelling, God dwelling with us; God walking among us; being a father to us (v. 18); having that connection, like a beloved daughter with her father—**if we have these promises**, if we would just cleanse ourselves and be separate, and go out of their midst, and not touch the unclean thing, and be different—he says, well then, let's do it: **“Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”** You want a picture of progressive sanctification? There's a phrase for you—bringing holiness to completion. Moving on—closing the gap—in the fear of God. What kind of fear? Being cast into outer darkness? Not talking about that; talking about a child who fears his Father in terms of “I want to please him. I want a good relationship with him. I want to hear ‘Well done, good and faithful servant,’ and not ‘hypocrite,’ ‘adulteress.’ I want that.”

This is the idea of us recognizing that as we close the gap, there is in our lives this great and fantastic relationship, and the blessings of that—the articulation of that—I don't have time for. You look at integrity—what do we get? We get a **clear conscience**—it'd be great to live without that internal accusation; have peace in my heart. I get **effective ministry**—and a lot more of it; and God chooses me from the tool cabinet to do things for him I never would have otherwise been picked by God to do. And I also get this **relationship with God** that I can't even begin to describe to you, with no time left in the message. But I want a personal walk with God—as the Bible says, “At his right hand are pleasures forevermore”—and I want God and I to be **in sync**.

When David was running from God—I guess two more homework assignments—**Psalms 32 and Psalm 51**. In Psalm 51 the superscript talks about Nathan confronting David about his sin with Bathsheba. And then that description—both in Psalm 32 and in Psalm 51—of him running from God: there was that moment of him recognizing, “I just need to stop fighting my conscience and God's conviction. I need to stop being a hypocrite and be a man of integrity,” which means this: I can get this right with God; I can come clean; I can renounce my sin, confess it, and move forward. And the Bible says when that happens—I love the way it's put in Psalm 51:12–13—then God will **restore to us the joy of our salvation**. Talk about the intimacy of a relationship with the living



God. I love that—and a **willing spirit**—no longer am I fighting you; no longer is there this deceit, this hypocrisy. And then he says, “**Then** I will teach transgressors your way; **then** I will cause sinners to return to you.” He recognizes this: we’re not much good for God’s economy or his agenda or his objectives in the world when we’re living a life of hypocrisy.

How do you fix it? It can be fixed. “Yeah, but Mike, I fail a lot in this area.” God can fix this. The **fruit of the Spirit** in your life and the work of his Spirit to change you is real, and it’s there, and it’s available—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, self-control—you know the list. Those are things that, as they’re absent in your life, create this increasing gap between the reality of your character and the profession of your faith. That **can close** as God gets involved. It starts with you confessing—agreeing with God: “I’ve got a problem”—and **renouncing**.

Recently I went to the **hand doctor**—of all doctors, right—hand doctor. I started having pain in my hands; and they started to hurt. I know my mom has really bad arthritis. And so I had enough pain—enough problems in my hands—I finally got a good referral from a dear lady in our church, and I went to this great hand doctor in South County. So there I go—I walk in. “Doc, I’ve got problems. All kinds of problems. Help me.” “Okay, man—what’s your problem?” We get all this stuff filled out; all the surveys done; he does all these examinations. He takes me in for all these x-rays. I get all the stuff done. I sit down with him. I said, “You know, I’ve watched what this has done to my family members and what it’s done to my mom. Okay—can you fix this, please?” He says, “Well, let me first tell you what the problem is.” Okay—get all the problems. “See this? Look at this line. Here’s what this is, and this is why you have pain here. Look at the x-ray here—and we’re missing this; we’ve got this parameter...” Fine, fine, fine, fine—I **get the problem**. Having relatively good health throughout my life, you know, when I go to the doctor, I expect them to **fix** it. So my former hand doctor says to me, he says, “Right—**nothing I can do**.” “What do you mean, ‘Nothing I can do’? Are you kidding me? You just explained to me in great detail my problem.” “Yeah, I get that. Well, you can take glucosamine if you want.” I said, “Does that work?” “I don’t know. There’s no evidence it works. But people take it.” “I don’t want to take pills if they’re not going to do anything. Fix me, man.” “Can’t do it.”

I left that—number one—feeling really **old** after that appointment, and really **angry**. Really mad. A great detail—very clear, specific diagnosis—with **no help**.

We open the Word of God—I know it’s painful. You go to this church—sometimes the sermons are painful—right? Just the x-ray of God’s Word—“Oh, look at all that—you’re calling me out on being a hypocrite.” Great—I get that. When we look at the x-ray and we diagnose the problem, the good news with God is the **Great Physician**, whatever the problem in your character is—there’s a **solution** for it. It may not be a pill you want to swallow; there may be some difficulty of **denying yourself**, taking up your cross, and following him. But God has the **remedy**. I just need us to see that and to turn to him and say, “God, I want this week to be less hypocrisy and more integrity. I’m willing to do whatever it takes—by your Spirit’s empowerment.” We need to start there. It starts



with **honesty**, and then it goes quickly to recognizing that our **utter dependence on God** is what—we need to cling to him in the midst of this all.

I think about people with bad histories. I think of the Apostle **Paul** himself. And this may sound like I've been a terrible doctor looking deep into your soul with this sermon, but let me be a **Barnabas** right now. A lot of people think you **can't change**; you can't be any different. I'll put my arm around you, as Barnabas, and say, "Listen—you can. God can fix this. I believe you can be different. I believe that God can change who you are this week. I believe that—I've seen it happen." And Paul—the guy who wrote half the New Testament—is **living proof** of this.

Let's pray.

God, I know it's tough for us to look in the mirror of your Word, especially when we're honest enough to see maybe that there is a pretty good-sized gap between our profession of faith and the reality of our practice. That the kind of Christian people think I am is nowhere near the Christian that I actually am. And when we start seeing that and getting honest about it, we can get discouraged. But God, if we really look at the problems on the x-ray, let us all have hope this morning that you are the God that has provided a **solution**. You've given us clear directives in your Word—as painful as some of them are—to marshal the members of our flesh as instruments of righteousness. You haven't left us without medicine. The Spirit of God is a powerful agent of change in our lives. And as we look to him—as we seek his involvement in our every decision—to see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, self-control exercised in our lives by his presence, we know there **can** be a difference. The trajectory of our lives can change. The gap between what we profess and what we do—it can be closed.

So God, I pray for that. Not only so we can enjoy a clear conscience and have, you know, effective ministry and enjoy a closer, intimate relationship with you—although all those things are true—but ultimately because it's the **right thing** to do. We even get to the end of Romans 2 where it says the extent to which we don't do this, the Gentiles blaspheme because of the gap. We want people to have nothing bad to say about us—we want them to have to **make things up** about us if they're going to criticize—because we're living what we preach; we're doing what we say.

So God, enable us to do that, I pray, as we look to your Word; we look to the strength that you provide. We love you for your Word—as painful as it is sometimes to see it for what it is and what it says about us. As the apostle said, "Where else are we going to go? You have the words of life." So we accept the diagnosis, and I pray we'll apply the remedy. In Jesus' name, **Amen**.