

Woe! That is title of this series. We are in part 4. The church has always had a problem with hypocrisy. When Jesus saw it, he denounced the hypocrisy. When the world sees it, they reject the church. The hypocrisy of the church is the single greatest factor that keeps people from church. A study by the Barna Group reports that 66% of millennials believe that American church goers are hypocrites. Those of us in the church know that their perception is wrong. It is not 66%. It's 100% percent. All of us have believed something, committed to something, or even taught something that we have failed to live out. We are doing this study because our hypocrisy is not hopeless. In every woe God is calling us to change. We are pursuing a way of doing life and church that pleases God.

Here is where we have been.

Hypocritical Evangelism- Bringing people to religion while keeping them from God.

Hypocritical Compassion- Caring for people when we can get attention for it. Exploiting people when we can get away with it.

Hypocritical Obedience- Strict with particulars. Blind to principles.

In part 4 we are confronted with ***hypocritical purity***, which we are summarizing as ***valuing inner purity less than outer purity***.

For some, a hot drink in the morning is not just nice, it is essential. Our cultural obsession has reached irrational levels. Seven out of ten Americans drink it daily, making it the second most consumed beverage in America, slightly less popular than water. Americans drink 146 billion cups of coffee a year. America drinks 1.9 cups of coffee per person per day. That means some people are drinking a whole lot. In fact, 36% of Americans report drinking 3-5 cups per day. And amazingly, that only places the US as the 25th country on the list of coffee consumed per capita.¹

I wouldn't understand. I am not a coffee drinker. Hot drinks are not part of my morning routine. So, when I poke some fun at coffee culture, as I intend to do now, you may find me insensitive, but you can't call me a hypocrite. But seriously, no judgment is intended in the following rant. I am just having some fun while I make my point.

One fine morning, you do as you always do. It is not just an addiction thing; it is a cultural thing. You're not fully awake but you're up and aware enough to perform your memorized routine. You put your favorite blend into the Keurig. You grab your favorite sweetener. You pour your favorite creamer into your stainless steel vibrating frother. Coffee culture just makes up words, "frother", "macchiato"... With each step of the routine the day is looking better. It smells right. It feels right. You still aren't talking to anyone but behind the nearly shut eyelids and the bedhead you are feeling good enough that you just might attempt making a swooping heart design with your creamer on the surface of your drink. If it turns out good, you will show the world how ready you are for your day with a photo on Instagram. Not a photo of you, of course, but of the coffee art you are envisioning as your cup brews. The drink is essential, not only because it wakes you up, but because it looks good. There was a time when we kept our chemical dependencies a secret. Now that drink is a status symbol, a favorite topic of conversation, and a primary point of social connection. Far from being ashamed, there are socially accepted boasting rights for those who require the most coffee. There is a drink on the YouTubers tables.

It is not there to drink. It just needs to appear in the shot to relate to the audience and build credibility. We used to put diplomas on our walls. Now we just put a coffee cup on our desk. See, it is not just enough to drink it. You must be seen drinking it. You could finish it on the drive in, but you have to pace yourself so you can arrive with it in your hand. It is the adult substitute for a comfort blanket. It gives us something to hold onto in awkward social settings. I told you; I don't get it. But at least you are making it a home where it could cost you around \$0.25 per cup. Does anyone have a good answer for why people pay the price of a modest meal for 12 ounces of something that is 97% water? Maybe it is those made-up Italian words that boost the perceived value. Or the handwritten chalk board signs. Anyhow, you are making your own cup, and it is almost done. That is when you realize that you're missing something, your mug. You are snapped out of autopilot when steaming brown water starts to trickle out of your Keurig and your cup is not there to catch it. Moving as quickly as an uncaffeinated morning mind can, you place a bowl to catch the rest of your drink.

A quick warning, now is when this illustration transitions from making fun of coffee culture to being plain gross, but with a point. It doesn't take you long to realize that your toddler has taken your mug and has been using it as a mini excavator in the cat litter box. Yes, it is gross. But that drink is worth the fight. You don't panic. You are a parent. And, for those reading this who are not parents, you should know that just a few months of parenting will desensitize you to poop and certify you as a poop cleaning expert. You live every moment of your life on alert to respond to the next poop related disaster. With only a split second of disgust you spring into action. You carry your toddler to the tub then survey the damage to the cup. All this is going to make you late. Something must be cut. For a brief moment you can't decide between your coffee and your kid. But they are both essential. And they are both covered in cat litter. You start with the cup. It's covered inside and out. But, remember you are a parent. You carry antibacterial wipes in the pockets of your pajamas. They kill 99.9% of all bacteria. You start thinking about that 0.01%. It is a small percentage, but when that 0.01% is used cat litter, you had better do a good job cleaning. As a parent you have three other brands of antibacterial cleaners within 5 feet of you at any point in your home. You wash, rinse, dry, dress, and feed your child. It's go time and the only thing left undone is cleaning the inside of the cup. But the drink is essential, so you shamelessly pour your kitty litter cappuccino. You made it. It's all going to be ok. The cup looks great on the outside. Nobody will be able to tell. They can't see what is on the inside of the cup.

If you are the one drinking, which do you value more, a cup that is clean on the inside or a cup that is clean on the outside? Certainly, it is preferable for it to be clean everywhere. But clean on the inside is more than a preference, it is essential. ***Hypocritical purity is valuing inner purity less than outer purity.*** The crucial question is, "What's in the cup?"

I felt free to illustrate this point crudely because Jesus did. For this message we get a double woe.

Matthew 23:25-28

²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Hypocritical purity is valuing inner purity less than outer purity. What I want you to be convicted of today is the incredible value of inner purity. What I want you to feel today is hope. That priceless experience of purity is available to you. What I want you to do today is ask yourself, “What’s in the cup?” and take a decisive action step toward God’s cleansing.

The Value of Outer Purity

The first element of these two woes is our value for outer purity.

Verse 25 “For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate...”

Verse 27 “For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful...”

I choose these words carefully, ***Hypocritical purity is valuing inner purity less than outer purity.*** I could have simply said that it is being clean on the outside and not inside. But the root of this condition is in our values. We under value inner purity and we misplace the value of outer purity. I could have said that it is valuing outer purity more than inner purity. I flipped them and used the word “less” because the problem is not that we value outer purity. We should value outer purity. It matters a lot. We want people to see our good deeds and praise our father in heaven. The problem is that we under value inner purity. And we value outer purity for our own sake rather than for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

You may have not realized how technologically advanced they were at the time of Christ. It is obvious in these woes that Jesus is describing social media. It doesn’t matter what I really look like. It matters that I use the right filter. It doesn’t matter if my house is a mess. If I shove the mess 6 inches out of the frame of this picture, they will never know that every pair of clothes I own is either on my body, lost under my bed, or in a 5-foot-tall heap just out of the camera shot. It’s ok that I am depressed because that camera angle, outfit and smile perfectly combine to give the impression that I am enjoying my life. Social media is a clear example of this distorted belief that there is more value in outer purity than inner purity. If we were to assess value rationally, we would agree that it is more valuable to live in a clean house than to have people think we live in a clean house and overcome depression rather than to have people think we are happy. It’s obvious. It is better to have it be real than for it to be only perceived. Our love for being seen has distorted our value judgment so that sometimes we believe that their positive perception matters more than our positive reality. Our behavior suggests that

inner purity is less valuable to us than outer purity. There is great value in outer purity but that value is not in convincing others that you are amazing.

This is what Jesus said previously about the religious leaders love for outer purity.

Notice that the rewards of outer purity are each centered on how we are seen by others and by self but there is no reward for how God sees us. He looks at the inside. He cares about what is in the cup.

Matthew 23:5-7 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

Phylacteries are boxes that contain the scriptures and are worn like headlamps, placing God's word physically over the frontal lobe, or alternatively on the arm (Exodus 13:1-10; 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21). It is a beautiful physical reminder to keep God's word in the mind. Hypocritical purity has a higher value for being seen with a large Bible box than for having God's word live in us.

The tassels were God's idea. He told Moses to tell the people to put tassels on the four corners of their garment "for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord." (Numbers 15:37-42). They were not for others to look at but for the person wearing them to look at. Jesus wore these tassels. This is the fringe of his garment that the woman with the discharge of blood touched (Matthew 9:20). God instructed them to make tassels for them to see and be reminded of the law. They made the tassels long for others to see and be impressed with their outer purity.

What's inside the cup? There is value to the outer purity of phylacteries and tassels. But the greater value is the inner purity of the word of God and a life in harmony with his commands. Which is more valuable?

Outer purity has two obvious and seductive rewards.

1. Reputation (how others see us). Reputation makes us appear pure. This could bring us respect, job opportunities, and friends. It can be an honorable representation of God. Without inner purity it is a lie.
2. Self-Image (how we see ourselves). It is a wonderful reward to see the fruits of the Spirit flowing through our lives. It can easily become a prideful thing. Here again, without inner purity, outer purity is self-deception.

You can put new siding on rotten studs, but it won't fix the house. You can dump miracle sauce on an oyster, but it will still taste like slimy ocean. You can polish the exterior of sin, but it still destroys. Being clean on the outside does have value but only as an honest reflection of the clean interior.

How would you feel if you led a campaign to raise money for bringing satellite dishes to remote 3rd world villages to give them lifesaving communication ability? How would you feel if you visited those villages 3 months later and found them using those dishes only as serving trays for mangos? There is some limited value in using a new iPad as a potholder. You could use a gold nugget as a paper weight. Brand new top of the line downhill skis with a full carbon laminate over a wood core would work fine as decoration in your dry cabin. Just like satellite dishes would work for serving mangos. There is some value in using these things in these ways. But if you know their true value and ability, you have an urge to say, "That is not what it is made for." I imagine the angels of heaven, looking at those who enjoy hypocritical purity. They see us soaking in the value of reputation and self-image and they want to scream, "That is not what purity is made for." We miss incredible value when we limit purity to the outside.

The Value of Inner Purity

These woes expose what is in the cup for the hypocrites Jesus was addressing, greed and self-indulgence, dead people's bones, and all uncleanness, then hypocrisy and lawlessness. Add to these any specific sin that you might hide behind the whitewashed exterior. What's in the cup?

Then Jesus gives us this principle, "First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean." (v.26). We don't need to clean the outside. When the inside is clean the outside takes care of itself. This alone is enough evidence to prove that inner purity is more valuable than outer purity.

Let's make a comparison of the rewards. I hope to raise your appetite for inner purity. I hope you see its incredible value and crave it.

Value Comparison of Inner Purity and Outer Purity	
Outer Purity	Inner Purity
Reputation	Seeing God
Self-Image	Pleasing God
	Favor of God
	Serving God
	Peace with God

The great reward of inner purity is promised in the beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). To be pure in heart is to be clean on the inside of the cup. The reward for this is the highest privilege of seeing God. I enjoy mountain tops. They take work to reach. Among the many rewards is the view from the top. The view is large and inspiring. It does something good in me every time. I don't always want to go up when I am at the bottom. But I am always glad I came up once I am on the top. It is worth it every time. The view from the mountain top is a thin slice of the reward of seeing God. I can't explain it because I can't comprehend all that it means. This I know. There is a God. He created you and everything else. He is glorious beyond human imagination. His presence thrills heavenly beings continually and

forever. And he promises you that you can see him if you will let him clean you on the inside. This is a privilege reserved for those with inner purity.

Psalm 24:3-4

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully.

Here is the difference, with outer purity people see you. With inner purity, you see God. Which is more valuable?

Listen to how much David valued seeing God.

Psalm 27:4

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

Additionally, consider these outstanding rewards of inner purity.

Purity pleases God.

Psalm 51:6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purity receives the favor of God.

Psalm 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

Psalm 18:26 To the purified, you show yourself pure.

Purity positions us to serve God. Many of the times the word “purity” is used in the Bible is found in the instructions for building the temple. All the material was to be pure. Pure things are the things that are ready to be used of God. Notice in the verse below that the pure are available to serve in purity.

1 Peter 1:23

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Purity gives us peace with God.

Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Isaiah 32:17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

These are ridiculously valuable rewards. Inner purity wins.

Not all affirmation is of equal weight. I enjoy the comedy of the Father of the Bride movies. Martin Short plays an exocentric character named Frank. He has excessively irritated the father of the bride, George Banks (played by Steve Martin), by planning a wedding and baby shower that were way over the top and beyond George's budget. Then Frank designs the baby nursery. He is nervous because of the size of the bill. He shows the place to George. George says, "It's perfect." Frank says, "Coming from you George, that means a lot. A whole lot." Then he suggests that he remembers what he is feeling in this moment when he opens the bill and further that he should open the bill after Frank leaves. The praise meant more coming from George. We don't want the approval of just anyone. Cleaning the outside seeks the approval of people we don't know. Cleaning the inside seeks the approval of the God who sees the heart. Coming from God, approval means a whole lot.

I hesitated to share my opening illustration with the kitty litter. First, because it was gross. And second, because it was an obvious point. When I ask, "Which is more important, being clean on the inside or being clean on the outside?", the answer is so easy. I chose to give the illustration because what is easy to answer is not easy to live. When it comes to drinking kitty litter coffee, it is not some moral theory that restrains us. It is not a social expectation that keeps us from sipping. We don't say, "I know it looks rewarding but deep down inside I know it isn't right." No. We have a sense of smell, a sense of taste and a sense of decency higher than that of a dog. It is revolting to us. Why do we take kitty litter on the inside of the cup more seriously than sin? Why do we feel good about cleaning only the outside of the moral cup, but we would demand to clean the inside of the physical cup. I suggest that the disconnect is a form of religious atheism. We don't believe there is a God backing up those promises. We have a stronger belief in the consequences of kitty litter than we do in the consequences of sin. We have a stronger value for the reward of the physically clean inner cup than the spiritually clean inner life. Kitty litter is tangible. God is, we think, theoretical. For me to value inner purity less than outer purity suggests I don't really believe God. When we see more value in what purity can do for us socially than spiritually, we are denying the spiritual realm.

It is obvious in the kitty litter illustration. It became obvious for those who experience it. Ask the addict in recovery, "Is the greater reward of purity that you get to post the 3 months sober status on social media or that you get to live free?" They believe in the value of purity because it has given them their life back. Ask the person who is delivered from the bondage of pornography, "Is the greater reward of purity that your spouse is no longer suspicious or that you are no longer in chains?" Ask Naaman, "Is the greater reward of purity getting rid of the spots on your skin so you can look better or getting rid of the disease in your body so you can live?" My family spent 8 weeks hiking on the PCT. We had stretches of ten days without a shower. When we did get a shower, we knew that the reward was not appearing clean but being clean. There was some value in not looking dirty. There was great value in not feeling dirty.

In our religious atheism, we read verses like, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” and we dismiss that reward as a theory. If you are not moved by the consequences of spiritual cat litter, consider the rewards of purity that you are forfeiting.

My first hope is to convince you of how great the value is of being pure on the inside. My next hope is that you would feel hope that this purity is available to you. When you take an honest look at what is in your cup, you see things that aren’t good. Will you trust that our God is a purifier?

The word “cleansed” appears in these woes. The only other time Matthew uses the same word is in the story of the healing of the leper. Listen to the confidence in God’s ability to cleanse and the power that supports it.

Matthew 8:2-3

And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, ***you can make me clean.***”³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “***I will; be clean.***” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When you start to doubt God’s cleansing in you and you call yourself dirty, apply God’s rebuke to Peter to yourself, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” (Acts 10:15).

Consider this list of things that we hid on the inside and then consider the fact that God washes us from those.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

All of us are at risk of hopelessness. We are all sinners. We battle with specific impurities. When we lose the battle, we settle for letting the mess stay. We have come to terms with our limitations. We will probably never see God, but we might be able to gain the approval of religious people. Don’t settle. Take what is on the inside to the one who purifies the impure.

If you are feeling the calling to be cleansed, don't let it remain just a feeling. Let it progress with action. Ask yourself, "What's in the cup?". Be honest. Identify one specific area in which you need cleansing on the inside. Come to Jesus for cleansing. You are going to need to follow up on this for lasting change. To hold yourself accountable to seeking purity on the inside I encourage you to take out your phone now. Set an alarm and title the alarm "What's in the cup?". Set the alarm to go off daily for the next week. Set it for a time when you will be generally free so that you can check in with yourself. Really consider what is happening on the inside. If you are struggling to see progress, use this time to make a next step of action, like contacting a friend for accountability, adding a filter to your internet, or confessing to someone you can trust with your vulnerability.

Hypocritical purity values inner purity less than outer purity. These woes call us to prize inner purity as a most precious privilege. What's in the cup?

ⁱ <https://www.statista.com/topics/1248/coffee-market/#dossier-chapter4>