

Are You Ready for Company

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How would you feel if distant relatives showed up unannounced on your doorstep with plans to stay for a week and were eager to take a tour of your house? Would you have to scramble to avoid embarrassment?

If you're like me, there are probably some closets and drawers you wouldn't want them to open. Unless you've just finished your spring-cleaning, chances are you'd be hoping your guests didn't look closely enough to see the accumulated dust, the sun streaming through streaked windows, or the cobwebs in the corners.

As Christians, we are called to maintain lives that can be "toured" by outsiders at any time, without embarrassment. A commitment to holiness means having a life that is always "ready for company" and open for inspection—a life that can stand up to scrutiny—not just in the obvious things, but in the hidden places where most might not think to look.

Matching: Inside and Outside

Most Christians know how to do a quick pick-up in their lives whenever others come around to take a look. They've learned how to keep up a holy appearance. They know how to look and act when they're at church or want to leave a good impression on a friend.

But here's the real test: What would others discover if they took a closer look at your life? What would they find if they started opening the closets and drawers of your life?

This is one of the primary issues Jesus had with the Pharisees of His day. They were consumed with keeping up appearances while content to live with and overlook the mess beneath the surface, where it counted most. The problem wasn't with their outward behavior—their lust for human praise made them star performers. But Jesus could see what the people they were trying so hard to impress couldn't see—their hearts. And that's where the trouble was.

As Jesus pointed out, it's not that what's on the outside is unimportant. It's that it's meaningless to present a polished, immaculate image while masking the underlying scum. Such hypocrisy evoked a response from the Lord that was far from mild.

“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. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:27–28).

No wonder no one wants to be known as a “Pharisee” today! However, like the Pharisees, we have an amazing capacity to feel good about ourselves because we don’t commit certain kinds of sins, while brushing off as insignificant the interior pollution of our hearts.

We’ve never committed physical adultery . . . but we entertain lustful thoughts about someone else’s mate. We don’t commit acts of physical violence . . . but we harbor hatred toward those who have wronged us and mentally assassinate them or emotionally cut them off.

Does Jesus’ description of the Pharisees in any way apply to you?

- Is there any hypocrisy in your life? Is what’s on the outside the same as what’s on the inside? Do you appear outwardly to be godly, while inwardly harboring unholy attitudes, thoughts, or values?
- Are you as concerned about the inward reality of your life—that which only God can see—as you are about how you appear to others?
- If people could see your inner thoughts and desires, would they conclude that you are a holy person?

Making It Personal

The New Testament authors challenge believers to recognize their position in Christ—justified, redeemed, chosen by God, set apart for His purposes. Then we are exhorted to live a life—inside and out—that is consistent with our position.

I’d encourage you to take time to look up each of the following passages from Paul’s epistles that describes some aspect of what it means to live a holy life. Then prayerfully consider the application questions.

Speak the truth (Col. 3:9–10; Eph. 4:25).

- Are you deceiving anyone about anything—in your home? In your workplace? In your church?
- Are you more concerned about what others think of you than about what God knows to be true?

Put away anger (Eph. 4:31).

- Are you holding anger in your heart toward anyone?
- Are you easily irritated? Prone to impatience?

Watch your tongue (Eph. 4:29; 5:4).

- Do you speak words that are true, pure, good, and kind?
- Do your words encourage and build others up? Do your words minister grace to those who hear them?

Be sensitive to the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

- Are you sensitive to the things that grieve the Holy Spirit, or can you sin and not be grieved about it?
- Are you quick to respond to the conviction of God's Spirit when you have sinned?

Put on forgiveness and love (Col. 3:12–13).

- Are you holding a grudge or harboring bitterness in your heart toward anyone? Is there anyone who has hurt or wronged you that you have not fully forgiven?
- Is your life marked by love?

Let His peace rule (Col. 3:15).

- Does the peace of Christ control your life, or do you often fret and worry about circumstances beyond your control?
- Do you trust the sovereign wisdom and love of God to order your steps?

Be filled with His Word (Col. 3:16–17).

- Do you seek to fill your mind and heart with the Word of God?
- Do your conversations with other believers center on the Word and the ways of God?

Exhibit godly character (Eph. 5:1).

- Is there anything in your life that does not bear a “family resemblance” to God?
- Is there any pattern or practice in your life that, if others followed it, would lead them away from God?

Be morally pure (Eph. 5:3).

- Are you walking in moral purity and freedom? Is your thought life pure?
- Do you guard your heart and your eyes from influences that might tempt you to sin morally?

Walk in the light (Eph. 5:8–10).

- Do you consciously seek to know and to do what will please the Lord?
- Is there any area of your life that could not withstand the scrutiny of His holy light? Any area in which you are not walking as a child of light?

What did God show you through the passages above about the condition of your heart and your walk with Him? Pray that He would help you be consistent in living for Him—both on the inside and out.

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