

HOLINESS OR HYPOCRISY?

Luke 11:33–54

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“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.’ When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it.’ One of the experts in the law answered him, ‘Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.’ Jesus replied, ‘And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what

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your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.” Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.’ When Jesus left there, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say” (Luke 11:33–54, NIV).

My message this morning is titled “Holiness or Hypocrisy.” Up to this point in His ministry, Jesus had been letting His own teaching and life stand as a light in a dark place. Yet there were those who were not embracing His message. Therefore, Jesus identifies the problem not being in the light but in the lamp, the eye that does not see the light that is available. Obviously, in the verses we read just moments ago, verses 33–36, He is speaking of the Pharisees who have seen His light but have not seen it, because their own eye has been darkened.

It’s like the story of the man who goes into an art gallery and sees a masterpiece of some kind there which is universally acclaimed as a great work of art. He thinks ill of it and disdains it. In so doing, he passes judgment, not on the painting but upon himself and upon his own lack of taste.

What Jesus is saying is, “When you do not see Me, when you do not receive what I’m saying, you’re passing judgment upon yourself.” Therefore, He proceeds to give some woes against the Pharisees. We’ll look at those in just a moment.

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I think it's important to note that the Pharisees began as a holiness movement. They began as a revival movement. Their influence really goes back to the time of Ezra the scribe, in the fourth century before Christ. When Ezra came back from captivity and emphasized the law of God and its application to daily life. About two and a half centuries later, in the middle of the second century before Christ, there was tremendous pressure in Judaism to pull away from faith in God. There were a lot of efforts made by the conquering Syrians to get them to compromise their faith. At that time, there was a heroic resistance that culminated in the war of independence, a war celebrated in Israel yet today.

Out of that whole movement—to purge Israel of its idolatry and compromise and its sin—out of that came the party of the Pharisees whose name means “separated ones.” Their desire was to keep their nation as a separate nation unto God, to keep it pure and to keep God's laws. In order to do this, the Pharisees went through the Old Testament, especially the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and isolated 613 specific commandments which God gave in the Torah or the law. They set these commandments as that which distinguishes the person of God from the world. They further divided these commandments into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. But that still wasn't enough. They were so intense in making people follow after God, that for each commandment, they then conjectured the various circumstances where this commandment might be applied. They sought to build a hedge around the laws so that it would always be something that would keep God's people into God. For example, in the commandment about not working on the Sabbath, they came up with 39 additional principles of work on the Sabbath. Some of which sound rather ludicrous to us today, but they were very real then and, for many orthodox Jews today, they are still very real.

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But like all holiness movements, there is, in the course of the life of the holiness or revival movement, a tendency after a period of time to lose its vitality and let religion be reduced to a series of do's and don'ts and rules. Also, a tendency for hypocrisy to set in and people to start playing with rules in order to make themselves look more spiritual than someone else who isn't seeing the rules the same way.

The Pharisees aren't the only people who have done this. It's been done in every religion and faith, and I'm sad to say it's been done in the name of Christ as well. Holiness movements have a way of degenerating into hypocrisy. When that occurs, there is not only a negative reaction against holiness, but there's a negative reaction against hypocrisy. When you have a negative reaction against hypocrisy, people want to dump the baby out with the bath water and have a negative reaction against holiness as well.

How can we be holy without being hypocrites? How can our body be full of light and give light to others?

I think the answer to those questions is found in the six woes that Jesus gives against the Pharisees and their scribes. We must understand that the woe is not so much an expression of vindictiveness but an expression of regret and sorrow. In each of these regrets which Jesus expresses—and there are six—He condemns hypocrisy. If we will notice what He condemns and take its opposite, we can see what He approves. So rather than working on the negative side today in each of these six woes, I'd like to take what Jesus condemns and then let its opposite quality reflect what holiness is, because holiness stands exactly counter or against or contrary to hypocrisy.

I. The first thing that holiness does is brings wholeness.

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In verses 37–42, Hypocrisy produces the divided life. It lets us put our life into various compartments so that, if we keep walking before God—so we think—in certain compartments, then that is acceptable. But holiness unites. It makes us one person all the time and seeks to bring us in a unity way to God.

How do I illustrate this? It's here in the text. Jesus goes to a Pharisee's home and sits down to eat and they criticize Him because He doesn't wash His hands. That doesn't mean that He doesn't care about hygiene. That has nothing to do with hygiene. It has everything to do with ritual. The Pharisees had a particular way of washing their hands. They were fastidious about who they ate with because to eat with someone who was a nonobservant person would be to defile the whole meal. For example, the Pharisees would not eat in the home of a non-Pharisee. Many of them would not eat in the home of a non-Pharisee because it was just possible that that person was a nontithe, and they'd be eating meat and vegetables that had not been tithed. So they were rather strict about these things. Jesus didn't wash His hands and they noticed that, and it bothered them. Then Jesus looked around and said, "You cleanse the outside of the plate. But what are you doing with what's inside. Are you giving it to the poor?" And He says to them as well, "You evidently are performing your duties real well. You tithe even your garden vegetables and that is ok, that you should have done, tithe. But you've neglected something. You've neglected the justice and the love of God."

What the hypocrites were doing in the divided life was dividing the externals from internals. Saying if you're externally right, you must be ok with God, and letting themselves be excused when their internal life wasn't where it should be. Or they were placing a premium on keeping religious duties and neglecting their relationship with God, who alone can produce true holiness and justice.

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Hypocrisy divides us. It makes us one person on Sunday and another person on the other days of the week. Hypocrisy makes us one person around one set of friends and makes us a different person around another set of friends. Hypocrisy leads us to divide between the person we are in public and the person we are in private. Hypocrisy leads us to excuse in ourselves what we condemn in others. So while others tell a lie, I only stretch the truth. Hypocrisy condemns the sins of the flesh—immorality, adultery, homosexuality, fornication—but excuses sins of the spirit—bitterness and meanness and cantankerousness and ingratitude and selfishness. A hypocrite is a person trying to appear religious but living an inner life dominated by greed and evil. That's what Jesus says, "Your insides are full of greed and wickedness." By greed, He is speaking of a person who simply lives for self and whose religious duties are really not done for God but simply to enhance their own standing in the eyes of others.

Holiness, on the other hand, flows out of a relationship with the God of love and justice who makes us the same person everyday, the same person no matter who we're with or who we're not with, who produces in our life the character of Jesus Christ. Holiness brings wholeness.

II. A second thing that holiness does is it brings humility.

Verse 43. Hypocrisy brings pride. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You love the best seats in the synagogue and greetings in the marketplaces." The best seats in the synagogue were places up front or the seats that looked out to where people were sitting, so they could be noticed. I'm so glad to see that our church, by and large, is not filled with hypocrites because very few people will sit in the front seats. I don't know if back seating began with Jesus' teaching here. But I notice that every service the back seats always fill up. I hope it's out of honor for one another and not to get away from where the heat is. Spiritual heat, I'm speaking about.

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Humility. Greetings in the marketplace. That seems innocent. But when you're a religious person and you wear robes that describe your standing in the community, then the more you have to show your ecclesiastical office, the more elaborate the greeting and kisses and posturing. Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, "You love that kind of thing. You love being recognized." But holiness brings humility.

I reconnoitered through my mind in preparing this message on humble persons I've known. I do not have a book out on humility and how I attained it, so you'll not be able to read it. But one of the most humble persons I've ever met was a very brief passing in the night. I was a college student. I'd been reading church history about monasticism. There was a monastery south of Springfield, a Trappist monastery that had the order of silence. You could go there as a weekend guest and several monks were appointed to be there to be your host. You could observe what was happening. I thought it would enrich me culturally to go there. And, of course, I had my idea that that was a totally unspiritual thing to do, to go to a monastery. I was just full of "I know I'm better than them." I go there and the first night I'm sitting at a delicious dinner and, all of a sudden, before I realized it, I'm being served bread. I look up to see who's serving me and the abbot, the head of the monastery, had left his seat and gotten up to serve people. Then he went and got coffee. All that night he sort of kept getting up and hovering around our table. It was done very quietly. It wasn't done to call attention to him. He just kept serving us. Such a beautiful example of humility. Holiness makes us humble.

Jesus is addressing all of us who have a need, a felt need to be recognized. And who of us doesn't want to be recognized. We're encouraged and motivated if somebody comes along and recognizes us. But if we are neglected, would we do what we're doing if nobody sees us? If nobody says thanks, would we be involved in the Lord's work the way we are? Teach the

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Sunday class or do whatever we're doing for the Lord? Would we do it if no one noticed us?

Holiness will keep on going even though we recognize the importance of motivation as a factor and recognizing people for what they do. Yet humility born out of holiness simply goes ahead and gladly serves, even if there is no recognition.

III. A third thing about holiness is that it brings health.

Hypocrisy brings contamination. In verse 44, Jesus says the Pharisees are like unmarked graves which men walk over without knowing it. And what the Lord is referring to is Numbers 19:16.

One of the laws of the Torah, one of the 613 laws was that you could not touch a human bone or a grave. If you touched that which was dead, a human who was dead, you were defiled for seven days. Meaning ceremonially defiled. You could not enter the temple, offer sacrifice. There were other restrictions on your social life during that time. So they made it a practice to very clearly mark graves. The Pharisees were very fastidious about avoiding graves because they didn't want to become defiled. Jesus, looking at them says, "You're an unmarked grave. For when people come cross you, they get contaminated. They get defiled. Your spirit defiles them."

If you ever wondered why anybody would ever want to crucify meek and mild Jesus, you put yourself in the place of the person who said, "You're like a grave that isn't marked. And people come across you all the time and they're leaving your presence defiled." If you're not highly spiritual, you just might gnash your teeth at a statement like that.

Holiness, however, brings health. Holiness communicates a view of God that is right and true. Whereas, hypocrites give a fractured and broken view of God and, because they do so, they engender cynicism in people. True holiness engenders interest in God. Hypocrisy engenders cynicism.

IV. The fourth thing about holiness is it brings help.

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Verse 46. Actually what happens is verse 45 tells us that the experts in the law say, “Teacher, when You say these things, you insult us.” There were two groups here—the Pharisees and the scribes (or the experts in the law). The scribes belonged to the Pharisaic party in their interpretation of things. But they were the ones who were the legal scholars, who made the rules of what keeps the law and what doesn’t. For example, “Shall we eat an egg that is laid by a hen on the Sabbath?” The scribes would be wrestling with that question, then the logical underpinnings of that would be, did the chicken work when it laid the egg? Holiness brings help. When we could not keep God’s law, Jesus came to save us. He said, “I’ve come to seek and to save the lost.” Hypocrisy looks down upon people. It loads them down with burdens they can hardly carry, reducing things to an impossible rule-keeping agenda. But holiness lifts others up, because it is helping and non-condemnatory.

Holiness leads to compassion. Self-righteousness leads to self-justification. And it looks down upon people because it says, “I’m in possession of something you’re not. Too bad for you!”

There are some modern examples of hypocrisy that I can think of. I ran across a cute one this week. There’s a little poem out called the “Jogger’s Prayer.” People that are in good shape can look down on people who have the middle-age bulge. In doing so, they come across as better than the rest of us. So I thought I’d share with you this prayer of the jogger:

“Almighty God, as we sail with pure aerobic grace and strike methodic feet past the blind portals of our fellow citizens, past their chuck roast lives, and their necrotic vascular systems and rusting hips and slipped disks and desiccated lungs, past their implacable inertia and their inability to persevere and rise above the fully pensioned world they live in and push themselves to the limits of their capacity and achieve the white moment of slipping through the wall born aloft on one’s own third wind, past their cruisematic cars and upholstered lawn mowers and their gummy sweet

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children, already at work like little fat factories producing arterial plaque more quickly to join their parents in their joyless ride toward the grave. Help us, dear Lord, we beseech Thee, as we sail past this cold lard desolation to be big about it.”

If we want to make others holy, we need to adopt the attitudes of the Lord and help that the Lord used.

I ran across a story this week about a man by the name of Richard Jurnigan in Texas, whose kids won four goldfish at a school carnival. He had to find something to house them in. He went out the next morning, looking for an aquarium. He saw that the ones he looked at were the forty to seventy dollar range and he didn't want to pay that much money. He finally found one that was sitting on the floor and was very dirty. It had the gravel with it, the filter. He paid ten dollars for it, took it home and scrubbed it up and made it clean and filled it up with water and put the four goldfish in it and was very pleased these four fish had a new home.

The next morning, on Sunday, when they got up they found one of the fish was dead. Then, the next morning, the second fish had died and by Monday night, a third fish had died. By that time, he thought he may have done something wrong, so he called a friend who owned a thirty gallon tank. He asked the friend what he'd done wrong. The friend said, “What did you do when you got this tank home?” He said, “I washed it and scrubbed it with soap and got it all clean.” I don't know anything about fish but evidently that's a no-no. That soap is a killer soap and its effect—lingering in the tank—killed the fish.

Hypocrisy is somewhat like that. It brings condemnation, criticism, nagging. It's a killer. It tries to get people to change by condemning them. I will assure you, you'll never get anyone to change by criticizing them and condemning them and blaming them and telling them what they're not. The only way to get people to change is to do it Christ's way. And that is to love

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them into change and to believe in them and to build faith and most important of all, love.

Holiness helps.

V. The fifth thing about holiness is it brings honesty.

Verses 47–51. Jesus says, “Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets, for your fathers killed them.” Jesus is saying, evidently, “By building the tombs you hope to say, ‘We’re honoring the prophets.’” But Jesus says the reverse is true. You’re simply identifying yourself as a descendent of those who killed them. What you’re involved with, in decorating their tombs, is a big cover up. Hypocrisy is not basically honest. It’s playing out a front, going through a role, going through the motions. Holiness is real and honest.

I ran across a little statement that Oscar Hammerstein II said in his book *Lyrics* about seeing a picture of the Statue of Liberty on the cover of the *New York Herald* Sunday magazine. The picture was taken from a helicopter up in the air looking down on the Statue of Liberty. Oscar Hammerstein notes that what impressed him in that picture was the care that the sculptor had taken in the lady’s head, in the crown of her head and the hair style, everything was in place. It was as beautiful up there as it was in the torch, or the arm, or the rest of the whole massive body of the Statue of Liberty. He says what struck him, as he was seeing that, was that when the Statue of Liberty was made, flying machines had not yet been invented. There were no airplanes. There were no helicopters. So the sculptor had to know that once that thing was up in the air nobody would ever see the top of the head, so he could have gone ahead and done it lightly, once over. But he took care of the part of the Statue of Liberty that no one would ever see. Just a seagull flying every once in a while past the head would see it. But he took care. Oscar Hammerstein said he was impressed with that.

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That's what holiness does. Holiness says all of my life is lived before God. But even those parts that someone else doesn't see, the public doesn't see, my friends don't see, maybe even my family doesn't see, even those parts that are only open to God, I choose to care as much about that, about what I am in private, what I am before God in integrity. Holiness cares. Holiness is honesty. And holiness produces a desire to care about the part of life that only God himself sees.

VI. Then holiness brings hunger.

Verse 52. Hypocrisy, instead of bringing hunger, turns people away who want to be fed or closes doors to people. Jesus says, "You're experts of the law but you've taken away the key to knowledge, and you not only don't go in yourselves, but you don't allow anyone to enter who would go in." Jesus here is expressing such a reality because, when our own life becomes blocked to God, it's impossible for someone else to come to God through us. We're not getting in ourselves and we're not bringing in anyone else.

But holiness elicits hunger. It's possible for our own hearts to become hard and dull. If hypocrites close the door, Jesus is opening the door.

When I was younger, I used to say to my mother, "There are so many hypocrites in the church." I think now, looking back, I was being overly judgmental as a teenager. I thought, in order to live a Christian life, one had to be 100 percent perfect. I didn't take into account the fact that, although we're saved by grace, we're also kept by God's grace and what God's looking for is a person who keeps being transparent before Him. None of us are ever going to do everything 100 percent right, but it's important, when we've done something wrong, to stay open before the Lord and keep our spirit humble and keep confessing and growing, and not just break off.

I would say to my mother, "I've seen hypocrites." And my mother would say to me, and I think it was some of the best advice she ever gave, "Keep your eyes on Jesus." If you keep your gaze

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fixed on Him and see His holiness, watching Him will bring change in your own life. Balance and holiness is in need this day.

I want to digress for a minute in my conclusion and just talk kind of out of my heart. On the one hand, as people of God we're called upon to hold the law of God or the justice of God. And therefore, as Christians and as a church body, we need to take a stand on the great issues of our time: the issues of sexuality, abortion, premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality. We say, in all of those, "That's not God's will and not God's way; if you walk in immorality, it will bring harm to your life. If you walk in the sins of the flesh or sins of the spirit, it will bring harm to your life."

When we say these things in our society today, it appears so closed-minded. Christians get put down in the press and the media for being narrow-minded and bigoted. Somehow, we have to, as an individual Christian, bear witness to what is truth and what is the justice of God, without ourselves becoming hardened into being hypocrites or better-than-thou kind of people.

Somehow, Jesus was able to manage that beautiful balance of upholding the standard of God while touching people with the love of God. You can't divorce the two from one another. You can't talk about the love of God and then pretend that whatever anybody does is ok as long as you're sincere, because that would deny the justice of God and what God calls for in our relationships. There's so much, even in the body of Christ today—in feeling "I can do anything and God will forgive me," and to take such an attitude and come down on the side of God's love—that we don't adhere to God's justice and His holiness.

On the other hand, it's possible to come down so hard on the side of God's holiness that we come across to people as super-judgmental and better-than-thou, and that's not right either. At the risk of being somewhat pinpoint in my remarks, I read the church pages, religious news, as many of you, there's one particular person in the area that's always seen in the media as

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attacking other people. I've noticed he's been very brittle, harsh with people. He comes across as extremely stern and judgmental—"If you don't like it here, go somewhere else" attitude. While he's trying to uphold the law, it comes across as an "I'm better than you" and, instead of being won to the holiness he represents, the whole imagery is kind of a cardboard stick-figure sort of thing. It makes the unbeliever, and even the sensitive Christian, kind of cringe that there are people in the body of Christ who are so heavy handed in their upholding of holiness. You can uphold holiness without being that heavy-handed.

On the other hand, in the news this last week: Mother Teresa. I'm not saying, by using her as an illustration, that I agree with every aspect of theology which she would hold, but I have had attitudes in my own life toward people who have fallen into sin without having any mercy or compassion on them at all. I think we cannot help but live in our culture and be very much aware of the AIDS controversy. I have taken the attitude at various times, "People are getting what they deserve because the Bible says you will reap what you sow." Most of the people who are coming down with AIDS are practicing homosexuals, and that is condemned in Scripture. So there's a certain law of retribution that is at work. I've almost taken a delight in saying, "God has pronounced His judgment upon them." Then I see Mother Teresa, this last week, opening in New York City a home for AIDS victims, without ever compromising her church's stance or her personal stance on the sinfulness of homosexuality, yet she has sought to reach even those who were responsible for their disease by caring and ministering to the dying.

I see something of balance of the gospel of Jesus Christ in that, because the Scripture says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He didn't wait until we got all cleaned up. He didn't wait until He could look at us and say, "You weren't really responsible for that." When we were responsible, when we chose evil rather than good, when we chose self

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rather than God, while we were unloving and unlovable people, God loved us and Christ came to put His arm around us and bring us out of the mire and out of the sin and out of the loss of our life. Only that kind of balance of holiness will really reach the world. Hypocrisy will never do it. Legalism will never do it. It takes the love of Christ co-mingled with the justice and love of God. Jesus agreed with the Pharisees theologically. They were right on everything. They were agreeing. They believed in the resurrection. They believed in angels. Jesus believed, like the Pharisees, in the Holy Spirit. Jesus believed, like the Pharisees, in the literal inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures, that every word was from God and that it was totally without error in matters of doctrine or fact. Jesus believed that. He believed with the Pharisees that God had called Israel to a unique mission in the world. All that they shared in common, and yet that was the group He disagreed with the most. Why did He disagree with them? He disagreed with them, not because of their belief, but because of their behavior. Not because of their theology, but because of their lifestyle.

The Lord wants us—in our own life—to have that centeredness on Jesus, which allows us, on the one hand, to walk in those things which bear testimony to God’s law and His justice, yet on the other hand, His balance of caring and concern of a loving God. It’s when the love of God and the justice of God are brought together when a full witness is made to the world.

Holiness or hypocrisy. Holiness does some special things for us. It brings wholeness. It brings humility. It brings honesty. It brings health. It brings help. Holiness is what God would have us demonstrate.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for these moments in Your presence, for Your Word speaking to us. Some are here today, Lord, and may feel a division in their life, because one foot is in the door of

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serving You and loving You, and the other foot is in the world and against You. One part of them wants to be moral, and the other part of them pulls toward immorality. No one can live in two different worlds. No one can permanently play the role of the hypocrite and not ultimately have it come to light and a choice have to be made. Lord, we want to be real people. We don't want to play a Christian game. We don't want to wear a Christian name, just because it gives us business. There are so many people today that do that. They see that there's an advantage to being a Christian because there are financial contacts to be made and business to be done. Lord, we don't want to be that way. We want to follow You from our heart. We want the holiness which is wholesome, the holiness which is helpful, the holiness which is healing. Give that to us, Lord. In our personal lives and in the life of this church. We ask, through Christ. Amen.