

"Profession without Practice"
Parochial and Plain Sermons vol. I sermon 10
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1 "When there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that
2 they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye
3 of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Luke xii. 1.

4 HYPOCRISY is a serious word. We are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a
5 hateful, despicable character, and an uncommon one. How is it, then, that our Blessed
6 Lord, when surrounded by an innumerable multitude, began *first of all*, to warn His
7 disciples against hypocrisy, as though they were in especial danger of becoming like
8 those base deceivers, the Pharisees? Thus an instructive subject is opened to our
9 consideration, which I will now pursue.

10 I say, we are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a character of excessive
11 wickedness, and of very rare occurrence. That hypocrisy is a great wickedness need
12 not be questioned; but that it is an uncommon sin, is not true, as a little examination will
13 show us. For what is a hypocrite? We are apt to understand by a hypocrite, one who
14 makes a profession of religion for secret ends, without practising what he professes;
15 who is malevolent, covetous, or profligate, while he assumes an outward sanctity in his
16 words and conduct, and who does so deliberately and without remorse, deceiving
17 others, and not at all self-deceived. Such a man, truly, would be a portent, for he seems
18 to disbelieve the existence of a God who sees the heart. I will not deny that in some
19 ages, nay, in all ages, a few such men have existed. But this is not what our Saviour
20 seems to have meant by a hypocrite, nor were the Pharisees such.

21 The Pharisees, it is true, said one thing and did another; but they were not aware that
22 they were thus inconsistent; they deceived *themselves* as well as others. Indeed, it is
23 not in human nature to deceive others for any long time, without in a measure deceiving
24 ourselves also. And in most cases we contrive to deceive ourselves as much as we
25 deceive others. The Pharisees boasted they were Abraham's children, not at all
26 understanding, not knowing what was implied in the term. They were not really included
27 under the blessing given to Abraham, and they wished the world to believe they were;
28 but then they also themselves *thought* that they were, or, at least, with whatever
29 misgivings, they were, on the whole, persuaded of it. They had deceived themselves as
30 well as the world; and therefore our Lord sets before them the great and plain truth,
31 which, simple as it was, they had forgotten. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do
32 the works of Abraham." [John viii. 39.]

33 This truth, I say, they had *forgotten*;—for doubtless, they once knew it. There was a time
34 doubtless, when in some measure they knew themselves, and what they were doing.
35 When they began (each of them in his turn) to deceive the people, they were *not*, at the
36 moment, *self-deceived*. But by degrees they forgot,—because they did not care to retain
37 it in their knowledge,—they forgot that to be blessed like Abraham, they must be holy
38 like Abraham; that outward ceremonies avail nothing without inward purity, that their

39 thoughts and motives must be heavenly. Part of their duty they altogether ceased to
40 know; another part might still know indeed, but did not value as they ought. They
41 became ignorant of their own spiritual condition; it did not come home to them, that they
42 were supremely influenced by worldly objects; that zeal for God's service was but a
43 secondary principle in their conduct, and that they loved the praise of men better than
44 God's praise. They went on merely talking of religion, of heaven and hell, the blessed
45 and the reprobate, till their discourses became but words of course in their mouths, with
46 no true meaning attached to them; and they either did not read Holy Scripture at all, or
47 read it without earnestness and watchfulness to get at its real sense. Accordingly, they
48 were scrupulously careful of paying tithe even in the least matters, of mint, anise, and
49 cummin, while they omitted the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and
50 faith; and on this account our Lord calls them "*blind guides*,"—not bold impious
51 deceivers, who *knew* that they were false guides, but *blind*. [Matt. xxiii. 24. Luke xi. 39-
52 52.] Again, they were *blind*, in thinking that, had they lived in their fathers' days, they
53 would not have killed the prophets as their fathers did. They did not know themselves;
54 they had unawares deceived themselves as well as the people. Ignorance of their own
55 ignorance was their punishment and the evidence of their sin. "If ye were blind," our
56 Saviour says to them, if you were simply blind, and conscious you were so, and
57 distressed at it, "ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see,"—they did not even
58 know their blindness—"therefore your sin remaineth." [John ix. 41. [\[Note 1\]](#)]

59 This then is hypocrisy;—not simply for a man to deceive others, knowing all the while
60 that he *is* deceiving them, but to deceive himself *and* others at the same time, to aim at
61 their praise by a religious profession, without perceiving that he loves their praise more
62 than the praise of God, and that he is professing far more than he practises. And if this
63 be the true Scripture meaning of the word, we have some insight (as it appears) into the
64 reasons which induced our Divine Teacher to warn His Disciples in so marked a way
65 against hypocrisy. An innumerable multitude was thronging Him, and His disciples were
66 around Him. Twelve of them had been appointed to minister to Him as His especial
67 friends. Other seventy had been sent out from Him with miraculous gifts; and, on their
68 return, had with triumph told of their own wonderful doings. All of them had been
69 addressed by Him as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the children of His
70 kingdom. *They* were mediators between Him and the people at large, introducing to His
71 notice the sick and heavy-laden. And now they stood by Him, partaking in His
72 popularity, perhaps glorying in their connexion with the Christ, and pleased to be gazed
73 upon by the impatient crowd. Then it was that, instead of addressing the multitude, He
74 spoke first of all to His disciples, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which
75 is hypocrisy;" as if He had said, "What is the chief sin of My enemies and persecutors?
76 not that they openly deny God, but that they love a profession of religion for the sake of
77 the praise of men that follows it. They like to contrast themselves with other men; they
78 pride themselves on being a little flock, to whom life is secured in the midst of
79 reprobates; they like to stand and be admired amid their religious performances, and
80 think to be saved, not by their own personal holiness, but by the faith of their father
81 Abraham. All this delusion may come upon you also, if you forget that you are hereafter
82 to be tried one by one at God's judgment seat, according to your works. At present,
83 indeed, you are invested in My greatness, and have the credit of My teaching and

84 holiness: but 'there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid, that shall
85 not be known,' at the last day."

86 This warning against hypocrisy becomes still more needful and impressive, from the
87 greatness of the Christian privileges as contrasted with the Jewish. The Pharisees
88 boasted they were Abraham's children; we have the infinitely higher blessing which
89 fellowship with Christ imparts. In our infancy we have all been gifted with the most awful
90 and glorious titles, as children of God, members of Christ, and heirs of the kingdom
91 heaven. We have been honoured with the grant of spiritual influences, which have
92 overshadowed and rested upon us, making our very bodies temples of God; and when
93 we came to years of discretion, we were admitted to the mystery of a heavenly
94 communication of the Body and Blood of Christ. What is more likely, considering our
95 perverse nature, than that we should neglect the duties, while we wish to retain the
96 privileges of our Christian profession? Our Lord has sorrowfully foretold in His parables
97 what was to happen in His Church; for instance, when He compared it to a net which
98 gathered of every kind, but was not inspected till the end, and then emptied of its
99 various contents, good and bad. Till the day of visitation the visible Church will ever be
100 full of such hypocrites as I have described, who live on under her shadow, enjoying the
101 name of Christian, and vainly fancying they will partake its ultimate blessedness.

102 Perhaps, however, it will be granted that there are vast numbers in the Christian world
103 thus professing without adequately practising; and yet denied, that such a case is
104 enough to constitute a hypocrite in the Scripture sense of the word; as if a hypocrite
105 were one who professes himself to be what he is not, *with some bad motive*. It may be
106 urged that the Pharisees had an *end* in what they did, which careless and formal
107 Christians have not. But consider for a moment; what was the motive which urged the
108 Pharisees to their hypocrisy? surely that they might be seen of men, have glory of men
109 [\[Note 2\]](#). This is our Lord's own account of them. Now who will say that the esteem and
110 fear of the world's judgment, and the expectation of worldly advantages, do not at
111 present most powerfully influence the generality of men in their profession of
112 Christianity? so much so, that it is a hard matter, and is thought a great and noble act
113 for men who live in the public world to do what they believe to be their duty to God, in a
114 straight-forward way, should the opinion of society about it happen to run counter to
115 them. Indeed, there hardly has been a time since the Apostles' day, in which men were
116 more likely than in this age to do their good deeds to be seen of men, to lay out for
117 human praise, and therefore to shape their actions by the world's rule rather than God's
118 will. We ought to be very suspicious, every one of us, of the soundness of our faith and
119 virtue. Let us consider whether we should act as strictly as we now do, were the eyes of
120 our acquaintance and neighbours withdrawn from us. Not that a regard to the opinion of
121 others is a bad motive; in subordination to the fear of God's judgment, it is innocent and
122 allowable, and in many cases a duty to admit it; and the opportunity of doing so is a
123 gracious gift given from God to lead us forward in the right way. But when
124 we *prefer* man's fallible judgment to God's unerring command, then it is we are
125 wrong,—and in two ways; both *because* we prefer it, and because, being fallible, it will
126 mislead us; and what I am asking you, my brethren, is, not whether you merely regard
127 man's opinion of you (which you ought to do), but whether you set it before God's

128 judgment, which you assuredly should not do,—and which if you do, you are like the
129 Pharisees, so far as to be hypocrites, though you may not go so far as they did in their
130 hollow self-deceiving ways.

131 1. That even decently conducted Christians are most extensively and fearfully ruled by
132 the opinion of society about them, instead of living by faith in the unseen God, is proved
133 to my mind by the following circumstance;—that according as their rank in life makes
134 men independent of the judgment of others, so the profession of regularity and
135 strictness is given up. There are two classes of men who are withdrawn from the
136 judgment of the community; those who are above it, and those who are below it;—the
137 poorest class of all, which has no thought of maintaining itself by its own exertions, and
138 has lost shame; and what is called (to use a word of this world) high fashionable
139 society, by which I mean not the rich necessarily, but those among the rich and noble
140 who throw themselves out of the pale of the community, break the ties which attach
141 them to others, whether above or below themselves, and then live to themselves and
142 each other, their ordinary doings being unseen by the world at large. Now since it
143 happens that these two ranks, the outlaws, as they may be called, of public opinion, are
144 (to speak generally) the most openly and daringly profligate in their conduct, how much
145 may be thence inferred about the influence of a mere love of reputation in keeping
146 us *all* in the right way! It is plain, as a matter of fact, that the great mass of men are
147 protected from gross sin by the forms of society. The received laws of propriety and
148 decency, the prospect of a loss of character, stand as sentinels, giving the alarm, long
149 before their *Christian* principles have time to act. But among the poorest and rudest
150 class, on the contrary, such artificial safeguards against crime are unknown; and
151 (observe, I say) it is among them and that other class I have mentioned, that vice and
152 crime are most frequent. Are we, *therefore*, better than they? Scarcely. Doubtless their
153 temptations are greater, which alone prevents our boasting over them; but, besides, do
154 we not rather gain from the sight of their more scandalous sins a grave lesson and an
155 urgent warning for ourselves, a call on us for honest self-examination? for we are of the
156 same nature, with like passions with them; we may be better than they, but our mere
157 seeming so is no proof that we are. The question is, whether, in spite of our greater
158 apparent virtue, we should not fall like them, if the restraint of society were withdrawn;
159 i.e. whether we are not in the main hypocrites like the Pharisees, professing to honour
160 God, while we honour Him only so far as men require it of us?

161 2. Another test of being like or unlike the Pharisees may be mentioned. Our Lord warns
162 us against hypocrisy in three respects,—in doing our alms, in praying, and in fasting.
163 "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do
164 in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men ... When thou
165 prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the
166 synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men ... When ye
167 fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that
168 they may appear unto men to fast." [Matt. vi. 2-16.] Here let us ask ourselves, first about
169 our *alms*, whether we be not like the hypocrites. Doubtless some of our charity must be
170 public, for the very mentioning our name encourages others to follow our example. Still I
171 ask, is much of our charity also *private*? is as much private as is public? I will not ask

172 whether *much more* is done in secret than is done before men, though this, if possible,
173 ought to be the case. But at least, if we think in the first place of our public charities, and
174 only in the second of the duty of private alms-giving, are we not plainly like the
175 hypocritical Pharisees?

176 The manner of our *prayers* will supply us with a still stronger test. We are here
177 assembled in worship. It is well. Have we really been praying as well as seeming to
178 pray? have our minds been actively employed in trying to form in us the difficult habit of
179 prayer? Further, are we as regular in praying in our closet to our Father which is in
180 secret, as in public? [Note 3] Do we feel any great remorse in omitting our morning and
181 evening prayers, in saying them hastily and irreverently? And yet should not we feel
182 excessive pain and shame, and rightly, at the thought of having committed
183 any *openimpropriety* in church? Should we, for instance, be betrayed into laughter or
184 other light conduct during the service, should we not feel most acutely ashamed of
185 ourselves, and consider we had disgraced ourselves, notwithstanding our habit of
186 altogether forgetting the next moment any sinful carelessness at prayer in our closet? Is
187 not this to be as the Pharisees?

188 Take, again, the case of fasting. Alas! most of us, I fear, do not think at all of fasting. We
189 do not even let it enter our thoughts, nor debate with ourselves, whether or not it be
190 needful or suitable for us to fast, or in any way mortify our flesh. Well, this is *one* neglect
191 of Christ's words. But again, neither do we disfigure our outward appearance to *seem* to
192 fast, which the Pharisees did. Here we seem to differ from the Pharisees. Yet, in truth,
193 this very apparent difference is a singular confirmation of our real likeness to them.
194 Austerity gained them credit; it would gain us none. It would gain us little more than
195 mockery from the world. The age is changed. In Christ's time the show of fasting made
196 men appear saints in the eyes of the many. See then what we do. We keep up the
197 outward show of almsgiving and public worship,—observances which (it so happens)
198 the world approves. We have dropped the show of fasting, which (it so happens) the
199 world at the present day derides. Are we quite sure that if fasting were in honour, we
200 should not begin to hold fasts, as the Pharisees? Thus we seek the praise of men. But
201 in all this, how are we, in any good measure, following *God's* guidance and promises?

202 We see, then, how seasonable is our Lord's warning to us, His disciples, first of all, to
203 beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy: professing without practising.
204 He warns us against it as *leaven*, as a subtle insinuating evil which will silently spread
205 itself throughout the whole character, if we suffer it. He warns us, his disciples, lovingly
206 considerate for us, lest we make ourselves a scorn and derision to the profane
207 multitude, who throng around to gaze curiously, or malevolently, or selfishly, at His
208 doings. *They* seek Him, not as adoring Him for His miracles' sake, but, if so be that they
209 can obtain any thing from Him, or can please their natural tastes while they profess to
210 honour Him; and in time of trial they desert Him. They make a gain of godliness, or a
211 fashion. So He speaks not to *them*, but to us, His little flock, His Church, to whom it has
212 been His Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom [Note 4]; and He bids us take
213 heed of falling, as the Pharisees did before us, and like them coming short of our
214 reward. He warns us that the pretence of religion never deceives beyond a little time;

215 that sooner or later, "whatsoever we have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light,
216 and that which we have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the
217 housetops." Even in this world the discovery is often made. A man is brought into
218 temptation of some sort or other, and having no root in himself falls away, and gives
219 occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Nay, this will happen to him without
220 himself being aware of it; for though a man begins to deceive others before he deceives
221 himself, yet he does not deceive them so long as he deceives himself. Their eyes are at
222 length opened to him, while his own continue closed to himself. The world sees through
223 him, detects, and triumphs in detecting, his low motives and secular plans and artifices,
224 while he is but very faintly sensible of them himself, much less has a notion that others
225 clearly see them. And thus he will go on professing the highest principles and feelings,
226 while bad men scorn him, and insult true religion in his person.

227 Do not think I am speaking of one or two men, when I speak of the scandal which a
228 Christian's inconsistency brings upon his cause. The Christian world, so called, what is
229 it practically, but a witness for Satan rather than a witness for Christ? Rightly
230 understood, doubtless the very disobedience of Christians witnesses for Him who will
231 overcome whenever He is judged. But is there any *antecedent* prejudice against religion
232 so great as that which is occasioned by the lives of its professors? Let us ever
233 remember, that all who follow God with but a half heart, strengthen the hands of His
234 enemies, give cause of exultation to wicked men, perplex inquirers after truth, and bring
235 reproach upon their Saviour's name. It is a known fact, that unbelievers triumphantly
236 maintain that the greater part of the English people is on *their side*; that the
237 disobedience of professing Christians is a proof, that (whatever they say) yet in their
238 hearts they are unbelievers too. This we ourselves perhaps have heard said; and said,
239 not in the heat of argument, or as a satire, but in sober earnestness, from real and full
240 persuasion that it is true; that is, the men who have cast off their Saviour, console
241 themselves with the idea, that their neighbours, though too timid or too indolent openly
242 to do so, yet in secret, or at least in their real character, do the same. And witnessing
243 this general inconsistency, they despise them as unmanly, cowardly, and slavish, and
244 hate religion as the origin of this debasement of mind. "The people who in this country
245 call themselves Christians (says one of these men), with few exceptions,
246 are *not* believers; and every man of sense, whose bigotry has not blinded him, must see
247 that persons who are evidently devoted to *worldly gain*, or *worldly vanities*, or *luxurious*
248 *enjoyments*, though still preserving a little *decency*, while they *pretend* to believe the
249 infinitely momentous doctrines of Christianity, are performers in a *miserable farce*,
250 which is beneath contempt." Such are the words of an open enemy of Christ; as though
251 he felt *he* dared confess his unbelief, and despised the mean hypocrisy of those around
252 him. His argument, indeed, will not endure the trial of God's judgment at the last day, for
253 no one is an unbeliever but by his own fault. But though no excuse for him, it is their
254 condemnation. What, indeed, will they plead before the Throne of God, when, on the
255 revelation of all hidden deeds, this reviler of religion attributes his unbelief in a measure
256 to the sight of *their* inconsistent conduct? When he mentions this action or that
257 conversation, this violent or worldly conduct, that covetous or unjust transaction, or that
258 self-indulgent life, as partly the occasion of his falling away? "Woe unto the world (it is
259 written), because of scandals; for it must needs be that scandals come, but woe to the

260 man *by whom* the scandal cometh!" [Matt. xviii. 7.] Woe unto the deceiver and self-
261 deceived! "His hope shall perish; his hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a
262 spider's web: he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but
263 it shall not endure." [Job viii. 13-15.] God give us grace to flee from this woe while we
264 have time! Let us examine ourselves, to see if there be any wicked way in us; let us aim
265 at obtaining some comfortable assurance that we are in the narrow way that leads to
266 life. And let us pray God to enlighten us, and to guide us, and to give us the will to
267 please Him, and the power.

Notes

1. Vide James i. 22.

2. Matt. vi. 2, 5.

3. Matt. vi. 6.

4. Luke xii. 32.