

The Heart Condition That Can Kill Your Faith

Religious hypocrisy is toxic to your spiritual health. If you have it, take God's cure.

Every year when I go in for a checkup, the doctor always checks my heart. But as Christians, we need to check our spiritual hearts—our emotions, spirit life, mental life and physical life—a lot more often than once a year.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life” (AMP).

It doesn't say God will guard your heart, your pastor will guard your heart or your neighbor will guard your heart. It says *you* guard your heart. That's what I mean when I say we need to check our hearts.

Just think about how long it takes you to get ready in the morning to make sure you look good. My husband, Dave, takes quite a bit of time, but it's nothing compared with the amount of time I take.

Now, if we can go to all that trouble to check our outward appearance—make sure nothing's crooked, the lipstick isn't smeared, earrings are right, everything is cool, zipper's just right—then surely we can spend some time checking our hearts.

There are many different types of heart conditions we need to look for regularly. If we find any of them, we need to do everything in our power to get rid of them. One of them is a “hypocritical heart.”

A hypocrite is someone who tells everybody else what to do but doesn't do any of those things. This person knows what

everybody else ought to do, but isn't doing it.

This is something we need to be very careful of. We hear sermons about love and mercy and forgiveness. But if we're not living them out ourselves, in word *and* deed, then what good is that knowledge?

I used to be so bad about this. Dave and I would go to church, and I would "Amen!" with the rest of them. But then after service we'd go to lunch with the "elite" social group in church and gossip about who wasn't there, who was there, what they were wearing, what the preacher did and so on.

I was a hypocrite—a religious person who knows what is right but doesn't do it. You see, in church I looked one way, but my actions outside church showed where my heart truly was. We need to ask ourselves: "What are we *doing*?" not "What are we *pretending* to do?"

Do you remember the fig tree Jesus cursed? He was walking along hungry and saw in the distance a fig tree that had leaves on it. He went up to it to get something to eat and there was no fruit, so He cursed it and said, "Now you're never going to have fruit."

I never understood that. I actually felt sorry for that fig tree. I thought: *Well, how unfair. Just because it didn't have something You needed, it had to be cursed.* But then I learned that fig trees, when they have leaves on them, are supposed to have fruit under those leaves.

Jesus saw the leaves—in our case, the bumper sticker, the Jesus pin, our church attendance—and when He looked for the fruit, He found out the tree was a phony.

It was like a hypocrite. It pretended to have something it didn't. As Christians, we need to make sure we're not walking around with just a bunch of leaves and no fruit.

We live in a hungry world and there are a lot of hungry people in it. I'm talking about people who need God. They need light. They need truth. They need hope and something real to hang on to.

If you want to make sure that you have the fruit people around you need in order to have a true encounter with God, then you need to guard your heart—the deepest part of who you are—and remove any seeds of hypocrisy.

Take time today to sit down, have a meeting with yourself and ask yourself the hard questions. Then ask God to meet you where you are and change your heart. He will never fail to give you the grace to guard your heart so His love and life can flow through you.

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