

Sermon #22

Am I a Modern-day Pharisee?

God is true and pure, through and through.

He does not pretend, lie, deceive, delude or mislead.

Yet He does allow man to do all of these things.

God speaks the truth and reveals the truth, and lives according to truth.

The truth is not a burden; it is the thing that will set you free!

God highly prizes the truth, and urges us all to believe it and practice it.

He wants us to have the best.

Truth and love are best.

Jesus was full of grace and truth.

For people who knew they were sinners and wanted to escape
their life of sin, that was the best news they'd ever heard.

For many of the religious leaders and experts,

it was the most threatening thing they had ever encountered.

Although Jesus was merciful, He was also truth;

and that truth cut through their facades and pretenses to reveal
the heart attitude of sin underneath, which they were denying.

If you think that being a Christian means that you are always nice to
people, just read how Jesus dealt with the Pharisees and scribes.

He wasn't very nice to them at all,

but He told them the truth about themselves.

He called them hypocrites, blind guides, fools and a brood of vipers!

Sometimes the truth isn't nice, but it is always good.

Those who receive and believe the truth are blessed by it;

but those who deny and reject the truth feel tormented by it.

Most of the religious leaders of Jesus' time apparently chose
to deny and reject the truth.

Jesus is still full of grace and truth.

For people who know they are sinners and want to get out of their life of sin, this is still the best news they will ever hear.

And, to many religious experts and leaders, it is still the most threatening thing they will ever encounter.

Christ is still the truth, and that truth still cuts through their facades and pretenses to reveal the heart attitude of sin underneath, which many try hard to deny.

Just who were the Pharisees and scribes?

They were the most educated, respected and authoritative Jews.

They knew the Law backward and forward and were the ones who taught it to the people. They were not an obscure cult or fringe group; they were the core. They would compare to modern fundamentalist and orthodox leaders, rabbis, pastors and priests.

The Sadducees were a rival group that compares to religious liberals of today. They wanted to remove Judaism from its narrow restrictions and its separation from Greek culture.

They wanted to take part in the advantages of the life and culture of the Greeks. They would compare to religious liberals.

Fundamentalists and liberals: they are not much different today than they were then. They are still enemies and they are still fighting over power and dominance, and each side still thinks it is right and the other is wrong.

In Jesus' time, the Pharisees and Sadducees were at odds in nearly everything, with one notable exception: they were both opposed to Christ and His message. In this one thing they were united.

Now please bear in mind before I go any further that some of the religious leaders did accept Jesus and believe that He was the Christ.

But most of the religious authorities rejected Him, even to the point of plotting his destruction and having Him crucified.

You can read all about how they did this in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
I encourage you to do this, and see what the Spirit shows you about it.

It is useful to recognize the modern manifestations of hypocritical religious leaders.

It can encourage us to follow Christ rather than religious experts or cultural gurus, and can help us avoid the trap of hypocrisy ourselves.

Or, if you are already in that trap, it can motivate you to ask God to show you the truth and set you free from personal hypocrisy.

In reading about the religious leaders in the scripture, it is sometimes hard to relate what they were doing to what present-day Pharisees are doing, because of the different symbolism and culture. So I have tried to write these things down in terms of our current culture. This should in no way be a substitute for the original words of Jesus, but merely an aid in understanding.

{Handout: either give the congregation 5-10 minutes to read it themselves or go over it with them}

“I, the Lord your God, hate hypocrisy and pretense.

It is a great hindrance to the abundant, fulfilling life I have for you.
Shed it!

Turn to Me and be sincere, and I will lead you into truth.

I hate hypocrisy. Despise and detest it.

It misleads many and lowers their life.

It must be discarded or burned away if you want fulfillment in Me.

My ways are truth and light, love and mercy, honesty and integrity.

Imitate Me and seek My approval, not the approval of man.

I AM with you always, and I love you dearly.

I know who you are, what you are thinking, and all your desires.

I stand ready and willing to cover you with My robe of truth and love.

Give Me your life, and do what I say.

And you will be One with Me forever.”

Notes

I am a hypocritical Pharisee when I . . .

(check the ones that describe your own thoughts, words and/or actions)

- Preach that tithing is a law of God which should be obeyed, but then I break the law by not celebrating God and not distributing the tithe as the Law requires.
- Try to recruit new church members, while my daily behavior at work and home drives *away* from God those who know me.
- Appear beautiful and faithful and righteous at church, but treat my family, employees and/or close associates unlovingly.
- Say, “Whoever does not go to church regularly is not a true Christian”, while I spend no time in personal prayer, communion and Bible reading at home alone.
- Wouldn’t think of going to church, school or work without taking a shower and carefully grooming for the desired look, yet I do nothing to clean my heart and mind before going to be around other people.
- Dissect the Bible into the tiniest pieces, even researching Greek and Hebrew roots. Yet I do not listen to the insight of a child or obey the teachings of Christ.
- Preach that people should obey God by observing the Sabbath, yet I break the Law by pressuring them to do church work instead of resting.
- Claim that if I had lived in Jesus’ day, I would have listened to Him, yet I refuse to let people preach from my church’s pulpit unless they have church credentials.

- ❑ Distract people into controversies about doctrines and church issues instead of leading them to Christ and encouraging them to focus on God. I keep people so busy with church work that they have no desire or energy to seek or enter the kingdom of God.
- ❑ Claim that my church is the house of God--His house of prayer--yet resort to buying and selling things in the church to get more money.
- ❑ Pray aloud in church to impress others with my spirituality, or use prayer to try and manipulate others to do what I want them to do.
- ❑ Do things mainly to gain praise from men: I do good deeds to impress people and make myself look like a good Christian. I wear crosses prominently for people to see. I wear WWJD accessories to advertise my Christianity, or just to be in style, but I don't actually ask myself "What *would* Jesus do" and then obey it myself.
- ❑ Delight in being called "Pastor" or "Doctor" or "Teacher" or "Elder" or "Bishop" or "Rabbi" or "Father" or any other title of spiritual authority.
- ❑ Love to be greeted and recognized by people in public places and Wal-Mart, and when I like being in the seat of honor at church banquets, services and other activities.