

21. Spiritual analysis of hypocrites

November 25, 2007

I am sure that many of you have come across drawings or paintings of artists' renditions of Jesus Christ including the one of a blonde hair and blue eyed Jesus. Most of them have a few things in common:

- 1) The majority of them show His love for the human including the ones who were about to kill Him.
- 2) His mercy overflows toward people around Him.
- 3) They show the suffering of Jesus on the cross.
- 4) Welcoming the children
- 5) Cradling a lamb

Yet to this day, I have not seen any drawing or painting of Jesus letting out His anger and letting it roar. His eyes flash. His voice booms. His holy wrath lashes out at the wickedness around Him. Artists rarely portray this furious side of Christ.

If you believe the Jesus who is full of love, mercy and grace, you must believe the same Jesus who can dish out His holy and righteous indignation toward evil ones, especially the religious people who take advantage of others for their own benefits. As a matter of fact, at the second coming of Jesus Christ, you will see the full extension of His holy wrath against Satan and his followers.

This morning we are going to see a small portion of His anger that extended to the Jewish religious hypocrites, the Pharisees and scribes. He declared six woes to them. We need to learn what not to do from this lesson so that we may never become another religious hypocrite who God hates.

A. THE DEFINITION OF HYPOCRISY

Being a Pharisee doesn't mean a hypocrite. Pharisee means a member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic law in both its oral and written form. But the majority of them happened to be hypocrites throughout their history.

The definition of 'hypocrisy' is a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess. Its root word comes from Greek 'hypocrite' which means a stage actor who holds several different masks in his hands to play different roles that are not his true character.

Hypocrisy is hideous. What cancer is to the body, hypocrisy is to the church. It is a killing agent. Unfortunately, hypocrisy is also addictive. And even though Jesus reserved His most severe words of condemnation for the hypocrite, many people still seem to prefer that lifestyle to truth and authenticity.

The only people who don't think that they are hypocrites are the ones who practice hypocrisy. But God knows and the people around them know and will eventually know about the truth of their hypocrisy.

B. CEREMONIAL HAND WASHING

Luke 11:37-38 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. 38 When the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner.

Jesus was not being unhygienic when He had not first washed before dinner. He did not follow the extremely technical and rigid requirements of ceremonial washing practiced by many pious Jews.

For these ceremonial washings, special stone vessels of water were kept, because ordinary water might be unclean. In performing the ceremonial washing, you had to take at least enough of this water to fill one and one-half eggshells. You started by pouring the water over your hands starting at the fingers and running down towards your wrist. Then you cleansed each palm by rubbing the fist of the other hand into it. Then you poured water over your hands again, this time from the wrist towards the fingers.

A really strict Jew would do this not only before the meal, but also between each course. The rabbis were deadly serious about this. They said that bread eaten with unwashed hands was no better than excrement.

For centuries within the church, ceremonial symbols have represented the actual realities of our life in Christ. A problem occurs, however, when the symbols themselves take over what they represent.

In communion, for example, we eat the bread and drink fruit of vine to express our trust in the Savior, who redeemed us on the cross. However, the bread and the juice in themselves provide no spiritual nourishment apart from faith in Christ. Many people put their sole emphasis on communion itself instead of what it represents. They are only symbols. The reality is Christ's redemption.

At this stage in Christ's ministry, when the religious leaders were bent on destroying Him, why would a Pharisee invite Him to his home for a meal? It seems obvious that he was looking for an opportunity to accuse Jesus, and he thought he had it when Jesus did not practice the ceremonial washing before eating. Knowing what the host was thinking, Jesus responded by giving a "spiritual analysis" of the hypocrites.

C. NOT OUTSIDE ONLY, BUT MORE INSIDE

Luke 11:39-41 Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. 40 Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

The basic error of the Pharisees was thinking that righteousness was only a matter of external actions, and they minimized internal attitudes. They were very careful to keep the outside clean, but they ignored the wickedness within. They seemed to forget that the same God who created the outside also created the inside.

We still have modern day Pharisees among us. Sometimes, we, too, can be hypocrites by being concerned about what others think about us more than what the Lord thinks about us. We need to remember that reputation is what people think about us, but character is what God is concerned about. And it should be more important to us.

We might be able to impress others with our pseudo spiritual superiority but not God, because He sees in our true heart conditions.

D. SIX WOES AGAINST THE PHARISEES AND LAWYERS

These six “woes” parallel the “woes” in Matthew 23. Jesus started with the sins of the Pharisees and then turned to the sins of the lawyers, because it was their interpretations of the Law that formed the basis for the whole pharisaical system.

Woe #1: For observing the tiniest tithe yet disregarding the greatest virtues

Luke 11:42 But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The Pharisees were so meticulous in their outward obedience that they would literally tithe from their herb gardens, counting out seeds and leaves, and giving a tenth to God.

Legalism insists following the rules and regulations so much that it forgets the intention of the rules and regulations. God’s law is to teach us to love Him and the people He created.

The Mishna, which is a collection of early oral interpretations of the scriptures, became more important to these Pharisees to observe than God’s Law itself.

Don’t think that we don’t have this kind of thing anymore. The rules and regulations of church denominations have a tendency to supercede what the Bible says. A good example is ordaining women and homosexuals as clergies.

Some of you were taught that the NT does not teach about tithe and it is limited in the OT only. In v42, we see Jesus teaches otherwise. He tells us that His believers should tithe in spite of what individual would like to interpret about giving money to the Lord.

Woe #2: For craving religious limelight and public applause

Luke 11:43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Unlike the first row in a church, which is often reluctantly filled by latecomers, the front seats in the synagogue faced the congregation and were reserved for the most distinguished guests. The Pharisees clamored for these seats. They relished the pomp of being escorted to the front. They loved to sit there like kings, surveying their court and basking in the admiration of their subjects.

Many hypocritical people still seek recognition by others. There is only One whom we should revere and adore - that is Jesus, no human. That is why I don’t like to be called or call anyone “Reverend”.

Woe #3: For deceiving others into becoming defiled

Luke 11:44 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them.”

The comparison in this verse must have made the Pharisees who were present mad at Jesus to the extreme. The Jews had to be especially careful about ceremonial defilement from dead bodies, so they made sure the graves were carefully marked with white paint. But the Pharisees were like unmarked graves that did not look like graves at all. This meant that they were unconsciously defiling others when they thought they were helping them become holier.

At this point the lawyers, also known as scribes, stepped forward, only to receive a verbal swipe from Jesus.

Woe #4: For adding to others' guilt without assuming any themselves

Luke 11:45-46 Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, "Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also." 46 And He said, "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Like many bad lawyers nowadays who do not uphold justice for the sake of financial gain and find loopholes of the law to get the freedom of bad criminals, these lawyers in Jesus' day knew how to get away with murder.

Because of the way they interpreted the law, these experts in the Mosaic law laid heavy burdens on people, but not on themselves.

Woe #5: For faking obedience while looking pious

Luke 11:47-51 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' 50 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

Trying to impress people, the scribes were constructing or remodeling monuments to the dead prophets. Yet, ironically, none of them were building their lives on what the prophets had taught.

Jesus declared that their only true link to the prophets was through their fathers - who killed the prophets in the first place. By finishing the tombs, they were simply completing the job their forebears started.

Abel's murder is recorded in Genesis 4:8, Zechariah's in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 - the first and last books of the Hebrew Bible. Jesus was saying that from Abel to Zechariah, from beginning to end, the blood of the martyrs was on their hands. Why? Because their hearts harbored the same hateful spirit as they were going to kill Jesus for their convenience.

Woe #6: For substituting works for faith

Luke 11:52 Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."

Finally, the scribes were guilty of robbing the knowledge of the Word of God from the common people. Those who lead God's people in a legalistic way are guilty of a terrible crime before God - they keep others out of the kingdom.

Again, we have this kind of legalist who insists one particular version of the Bible is the only inspired and correct one and the rest are counterfeits from satan. They are "King James Only" people. I am not talking about some of you who read KJV and like it. KJV is a good version as well as others, like NKJV, NASB, TLB and NIV.

Those who insist that KJV is the only correct version, come from their own arrogance in their hearts. If they really want to have true authenticity of the Scripture, they should study the original manuscripts in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, not a 17th century English translation.

For those who insist KJV only, I have a question. What about the millions of born-again Christians in other countries who read and study the Bibles in their own language? Since they are not reading the KJV, are they also reading the devil's bible? Do these King James Only people actually think that God is completely helpless to prevent His children from reading satan's counterfeits? How do they come up with such non-sense remarks!

As I have said it before, the best version of the Bible is any version of the Holy Bible, exception of Today's NIV, not regular NIV, that you can understand and practice what you learn from it.

E. THE REACTION FROM THE ENEMY OF JESUS

Luke 11:53-54 And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, 54 lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.

Hypocrites do not want their sins exposed. It hurts their reputation. Instead of opposing the Lord, these men should have been seeking His mercy.

It is a privilege to have the light of the Word of God and the privilege of prayer. Our enemy satan wants to rob us of the blessings of spiritual growth and freedom. His plan is to substitute hypocrisy for reality and to encourage us to be more concerned about our own silly reputation than true character.

If I were Jesus, I would not eat any food they give to me after what He said to them.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) We should never try to cover wrong by cleaning up the externals of our lives.

We can't fix our sinfulness by sprinkling some religious flavor over the surface of our lives. To be truly clean, we must invite Christ into our inner chambers.

2) Let's always pay attention to the inside of our lives.

Living in a cosmetic world, we have at our fingertips everything we could ever need to look better than we truly are. But God sees behind our masks.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

3) We need to remember that nothing brings stench to God like hypocrisy in our lives.

Even non-believers can see it and despise it. In addition to that, Christians' hypocrisy bring great occasions to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme Him.

2 Samuel 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."

4) Outside sins are the results of our inner rebellious thoughts and decisions against the Lord. We cannot change our outside behavior until our hearts are changed by the Word of God.