

## 66. Spiritual diagnosis of the hypocrites

February 19, 2017

If you believe the Jesus who is full of love, mercy, and grace, you also must believe the same Jesus who can dish out His holy and righteous indignation toward evil ones, especially the religious people who took advantage of others for their own benefits. As a matter of fact, at the second coming of Jesus Christ in the future, you will see the full extension of His holy wrath against satan and his demonic and human 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 hypocrites whom God despises.

### A. THE DEFINITION OF HYPOCRISY

Being a Pharisee doesn't mean a hypocrite. The Pharisee was a member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic law in both its oral and written forms. 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.

Theologian John Stott said, "Hypocrisy is hideous. What cancer is to the body, hypocrisy is to the church. It is a killing agent." Unfortunately, hypocrisy is also very addictive. And even though Jesus reserved His most severe words of condemnation for the hypocrite, many people still seem to prefer that lifestyle over 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 marveled 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. They have not really cleaned their hands for the sake of proper hygiene, rather to show off one's spiritual superiority with empty rituals.

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 without ceremonially washed hands was no better than poopoo.

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 merely represent.

In communion, for example, we eat the bread and drink the 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 – nothing more, nothing less. But some denominations insist that the elements of the communion is the actual body and blood of Jesus. That theology is also known as "transubstantiation" and it is a false theology.

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 diagnosis" 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 of humans also created the inside.

We still have modern day Pharisees among us. Sometimes, we, too, can be hypocrites by being concerned about our reputation which is what others think about us more than the character what the Lord knows about us. And godly character should be more important to us than our reputation.

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. 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.

Legalism insists on following the rules and regulations so much that it forgets the intention of the rules and regulations. God's law teaches us to love Him and the people whom He created. That is the intention and the core message of the law.

Don't think that we don't have this kind of thing anymore. Many denominations' own rules and regulations became so important to some people in those denominations that they ignore what the Bible says and put theirs over God's Word. A good example is ordaining women and homosexuals as pastors.

### **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 21st century church, which is often remain empty or 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 thrived in 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, not any human. That is why I hate 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 in that place, were 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 Jesus said that the Pharisees were like unmarked graves that did not look like graves at all. This meant that they were consciously and unconsciously defiling others when they thought they helped them become holier.

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

### **Woe #4: For adding to others' guilt without assuming any for 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 and unethical lawyers nowadays who do not uphold justice for the sake of financial gain and find loopholes in 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 the lawyers 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 those 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 forefathers 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. Their legalistic approach had taken away understanding and knowledge. By giving the people a list of rules by which they could supposedly save themselves, they didn't help them at all.

While legalists are doing what they do best – looking for sins of others, they are the very ones who are committing the very sin that God despises: pride. Show me one legalist who is not proud of his own righteousness, holiness, and spirituality. You find NONE. They might think that they are spiritually superior than others, but, in reality, they are pathetically immature and arrogant sin-snippers.

## **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 Word of God and the accessibility to the Lord through 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 godly character.

## **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 flavors 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 everything we could ever need at our fingertips to look better than what 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 the stench to God like hypocrisy in our lives.**

Even unbelievers can see it and despise it. In addition to that, Christians' hypocrisy brings 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.**