

Eight Ways to Be a Bad Christian

#2 - Serve in order to be seen by others

Matthew 23:5-12

This morning I want to continue with part two of our series entitled, “Eight ways to be a bad Christian.” One of the necessities of being a Christian is self-evaluation. Thank God this morning that you and I sit here with the Spirit of God living within us who helps us in this process through conviction, inspiration, revelation – all done so that our God who loves us so much can change us more and more into people of love and character. David wrote in **Psalm 139:23**:

*23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
24 Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*

Yet, what I have found among many believers is a “feel-good” mentality where everything in their faith is met with superficial facades of faith instead of grueling effort to transform. Like the butterfly who fights to get out of its cocoon, it is the fight that makes it live and become something beautiful. Are we tired of a cultural Christianity? Are we tired of seeing people week after week, struggling with the same things, still the same when we first met them, yet coming in the door pretending that everything is great without any anxiety or struggle?

We need to be a church, that despite what the world would consider weaknesses, that we would be ourselves, with all the faults, and that we make this a place where we work out our faith, and where the glory and transforming life of Jesus will not allow us to remain the same, but will transform any person who comes in the doors. May people experience change in this place.

We want this to be an authentic place of change and not one that simply talks about it. We want this to be a place of authentic faith and not the mere running of our mouths with empty words, with empty promises, empty commitments and empty relationships. The reason why the world refuses to come to the church to find the answers to Christ is because we have, for too long, presented something that has nothing to do with Jesus and his mission. It is time for us to go back to what we have been called to be and do.

Last week we looked at the lessons from Jesus and his warnings about the religious people of his day – the Pharisees. They were the church in Jesus day, yet they too wandered away from the mission and focus on God. We saw last week that they made Christianity a burden to others and how instead of bringing a message of life and liberty in God, they placed the weight of expectations and the weight of judgment. This morning I want to look at the second lesson which we find in **Matthew 23:5-12**:

5 *“Everything they do is for show. On their arms they wear extra wide prayer boxes with Scripture verses inside, and they wear robes with extra long tassels.**
6 *And they love to sit at the head table at banquets and in the seats of honor in the synagogues.* 7 *They love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi.’** 8 *“Don’t let anyone call you ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters.**
9 *And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your spiritual Father.* 10 *And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah.* 11 *The greatest among you must be a servant.*
12 *But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

The motivation of the Pharisees was to be seen. In a recent part of my studying I was doing some research in regards to this current youth generation known as the Millennial generation which is currently the second largest generation our nation has ever seen. They will determine what the future of this country and the church will look like. What they are finding is that many of these young people refuse to go to the church for any spiritual direction and guidance because of the image of religion. In an article entitled “I love Jesus – not the church” it reads:

“The church has become a place that states “do what I say, don’t do as I do. The church has become a place about hierarchy, power and control with a political agenda, it is filled with leaders who function like CEO’s and desire power and control. Church leaders seem to focus more on acting like businessmen, raising funds to build bigger buildings for their own organized religious corporations, then they do on taking time to teach about social action for the poor and marginalized. I think Jesus would’ve cared more about raising money for the poor than building yet another mini-mall church.”

Are these things true? Unfortunately, we live in a time when you can’t always trust what you see. As human beings we tend to compartmentalize our lives: My social life, my work life, my church life. And we try to keep all of these things separate from each other instead of being real throughout all aspects of life. For some reason we are afraid to be ourselves and instead project an image far from who we truly are. Why? Because if you truly knew who I am then you probably wouldn’t accept me.

Projecting the right image has therefore become the priority of our lives. **The Church has fallen prey to the worlds images of success and has adapted business principles that have taken it away from the focus of servant-hood.** The opposite of wanting to be seen is being a servant. That’s why Jesus mentions servant-hood in verse 11. We need to get away from image and turn to internal transformation. What are the three traps of image:

1. The Trap of Recognition

Our text tells us that religious people do everything for a show. In fact, I have heard people from large churches call their Sunday morning services the “Big Show”. The Greek word here has the idea of “being looked upon with admiration” or “to be watched intently in order to learn from.” I think all of us want to be admired. We want recognition for our efforts.

I don’t think there is a problem with wanting to be loved by others, but the trap of image is that we will do certain things for the purpose of being admired – that the motivation is the love of people and not simply the love for God. It becomes a motivation of personal self-centeredness rather than an expression of inward compassion. In the Matthew Henry’s Commentary the author writes about this verse:

He that does all to be seen does nothing to the purpose of God.

18 Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies. John 7:18

Who truly does deserve all the glory and worship? You and I? Absolutely not! We have to remember that it is all about Jesus Christ and his work that changes people and it is about God’s Spirit coming and working in the lives of people. **Our motivation in all that we do is to be an act of worship towards God and not ourselves.** If we aren’t careful we may be teaching others around us the wrong motivation in life. The second trap of image we find this morning is the trap of attention.

2. The Trap of Attention

The Pharisees loved all the attention. What can happen within a church is that the motivation of love can become clouded by the motivation of myself – what’s in it for me, what do I get out of it? Their lives are not fully surrendered to God. Many Christians struggle with this and question the love and care of our Father. In **Romans 12:10** Paul writes to the church:

10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. (NIV)

Our demand for attention can keep us from seeing the people around us. Our demand for attention can insulate us from the needs and hurts of people. We can become so consumed in ourselves that we can see anything around us. A great theologian once wrote:

God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.

The third trap of image is the trap of comparison.

3. The Trap of Comparison

Notice in verse 7 and 8 – they loved being called Rabbi or Teacher. This trap can be seen in the church in all sorts of ways. I have seen this trap in the use of titles – there are those who seek position with a title and in a sense want to be set apart as different or greater than those who simply come to church. There is also the comparison in the type of church you go to and where denominations claim greater understanding of scripture than others. There is also the comparison believers to those who aren't believers yet. At the root however comparing ourselves can really be another way of saying, "I am better than you and I know more than you."

I have even been in circumstances where a person was unwilling to serve in a church simply because they weren't given a title. I have been in situations where you were told what to call the pastor or church leader and everyone was expected to comply. People have even left the church because a position or a title wasn't given to them. What does all of this have to do with the love and acceptance of Jesus Christ, and why have we allowed this comparison to become a stumbling point for so many who have seen it and refuse to come close to God because of it? **Philippians 2:3** says:

3 Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

Image is all about me! Being real and authentic is about living my life openly with God's guidance and love, and supporting and inspiring people around me to find the same guidance and love. It is time for us to stop worrying about what other people think and be a church who normal people can relate to. The answer to breaking the trap of image is servant-hood. Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**:

13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

Serving others in order to be seen by others leads to a path of self idolatry. Self-idolatry leads to self-righteousness, which then leads to religion in the negative sense of the word. We have not been called to live a religion of image but to live out a relationship with both God and mankind.

The great violinist, Niccolò Paganini willed his marvelous violin to city of Genoa on condition that it must never be played. The wood of such an instrument, while used and handled, wears only slightly, but set aside, it begins to decay. Paganini's lovely violin has today become worm-eaten and useless except as a relic. A Christian's unwillingness to serve may soon destroy his capacity for usefulness.

Make sure your motivation is right – for the glory of the King. Lets Pray!