

Eight Ways To Be a Bad Christian

Shut The Door On People Seeking Grace

Matthew 23:13

This morning I want to continue in our study of 8 ways to be a bad Christian. We have looked at two so far: A bad Christian makes Christianity a burden to others, and a bad Christian serves in order to be seen. This morning I want to look at the idea that bad Christians shut the door on people seeking grace. We find our text this morning in **Matthew 23:13**:

*13 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people’s faces. You won’t go in yourselves, and you don’t let others enter either.**

We know that in ancient times that the rabbis would carry a key which was symbolic of one who possessed knowledge. They had what they thought was the key but in reality their knowledge became their greatest stumbling block. **Isaiah 5:21** tells us:

21 What sorrow for those who are wise in their own eyes and think themselves so clever.

In their great knowledge they lost sight of the fact that they had the key that would usher in a new kingdom of grace through the person of Jesus Christ. Yet, because of their shortsightedness, they ignored the hundreds of scriptures in their own ancient writings concerning the coming of God’s Son. They had the information, but were so stuck in their religious ways and formalities that they missed it.

We know that the religious people of the day had the information about the coming of God’s son, because when King Herod wanted to find the child Jesus he went to the religious people and asked where the child would be born. In **Matthew 2:4-6** we read:

4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote: 6 ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’*”*

The Pharisees, the religious people of the day had the key to unlock the way to Christ, they had the information that confirmed his deity yet kept the door shut. Why? Why would you have all the information and refuse to give it away and embrace the freedom that would come with it? In the Matthew Henry’s commentary he writes about our text and tells us:

The Pharisees could have facilitated that great work of helping thousands to heaven, but instead, they shut up the kingdom of heaven and made it their

business to press the ceremonial law, and to suppress or squelch the prophecies which were happening right in front of them. Their goal was to bring prejudices against Christ and his doctrine.

They became the additional padlock that was put on the door. Because they refused to embrace who Jesus Christ was and what he stood for, many others followed their example. In fact, the Pharisees enforced the rejection of Jesus Christ through force. That is where Paul came from, one who was persecuting the church and doing all he could to combat its teachings. Even in **Acts 13:45** we read:

44 The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the word of the Lord. 45 But when some of the Jews saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said.

The Pharisees perverted Christ's doctrine, confronted his miracles, quarreled with his disciples, they did all they could to discredit and misrepresent Jesus, they thundered out their rejection of any one who would confessed acceptance of Jesus, even excommunicating them, promising that any who would follow Jesus would suffer violence.

It was clear that the Pharisees were against the new revelation of Jesus Christ, even though it was predicted in their own scriptures. That is why our text reads, "For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces. You won't go in yourselves, and you don't let others enter either."

The Pharisees could have taken the words of Moses and the prophets and shown people how it pointed to the Messiah and to Jesus Christ, yet they refused. They had a great opportunity yet ignored it. Why would they do such a thing? Although we cannot know what was going on in their heads, we do know what was said about them in Scripture. Therefore, I want to use them as an example for us as we look at the Three Locks of Bad Christianity:

Three Locks of Bad Christianity

1. The Lock of Traditionalism

The Pharisees put priority on their traditions rather than on people. I understand having family traditions, in fact, many of us like having things that we do every year that we can pass down from one generation to the next. But when traditions become the priority rather than the experience and the people, then something has gone wrong. Can we have traditions in the church? And can those become stumbling points for people? Absolutely.

Too much ceremonialism can lead to the idea that ceremonies are the path to God's grace when in reality it is only through faith. Traditionalism can also lead to the idea of being program oriented and can become empty and meaningless activities.

A very poor holy man lived in a remote part of China. Every day before his time of meditation in order to show his devotion, he put a dish of butter up on the window sill as an offering to God, since food was so scarce. One day his cat came in and ate the butter. To remedy this, he began tying the cat to the bedpost each day before the quiet time. This man was so revered for his piety that others joined him as disciples and worshipped as he did. Generations later, long after the holy man was dead, his followers placed an offering of butter on the window sill during their time of prayer and meditation. Furthermore, each one bought a cat and tied it to the bedpost.

To the Pharisee, the ceremonies were the priorities instead of being people of character, or integrity, and of true human compassion. I have nothing against doing things that may seem traditional or ceremonial, but it needs to be explained or attached to people. A marriage ceremony is important but it is meaningless unless commitment, love and mutual respect is discussed.

When one goes to church they take communion, they see a cross hanging on the wall, they see the offering plate being passed, and yet many churches do not explain why those things are there and why they are done.

I remember when we first moved into this building location. We came in and got rid of a lot of stuff and made changes to the building. In fact, in one week, we threw out the hymnals, the King James Bibles, and cut down the cross on the top of this building (talk about being non-traditional). In fact, someone jokingly told me that they could see the Headlines in the Paper, "Pastor takes over church, throws out hymnals and Bibles and cuts down cross."

Things need to be explained and understood. I was talking to a person about a year ago and he asked why churches put a cross on their wall. I asked him why he was asking the question and he responded, "Why would you hang a torture device on a wall?" This gave me an opportunity to explain what the cross meant to our faith.

Traditionalism can keep people out of the kingdom of God. **Traditionalism can make Christianity seem impersonal and non-relational and the reality is that the Kingdom of God is all about people and their hope found in Jesus Christ.** The second lock of Bad Christianity is Ignorance.

2. The Lock of Ignorance

What I mean by this is that we need to be people who are willing to learn and be teachable. **Ignorance simply neglects truth and refuses to change.** Even though the Pharisees had the information, they refused to take another look at it and remain teachable and thus refused to change. Jesus said the Pharisees in **Matthew 16:3:**

2 He replied, "You know the saying, 'Red sky at night means fair weather tomorrow; 3 red sky in the morning means foul weather all day.' You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but you don't know how to interpret the signs of the times!"*

In other words, you have all the information you need, its right in front of you, but you refuse to see it. I have talked to many who have made the claim that they have read the Bible and yet it is clear that they haven't. I have talked to many Christians who claim that they have read the Bible, yet their life is no different, and it is clear that they truly haven't.

Once out of school, nearly 60 percent of all adult Americans will never again read a single book. (Youth Workers Update, 1992)

If we are unwilling to change, to learn, and grow, how will people around us see the fruit in our lives that will cause them to say, "I want to know and experience what they have"? **We can stay stuck and play church, but transformed lives transforms lives.** May we be students of God's Word, not because that is what is expected of us, but so that we can grow and mature, so that we can find relief in the rut of life, so that our motivation changes and becomes an expression of love and grace. **Matthew 5:16:**

16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Can our ignorance and unwillingness to be teachable stop others from finding hope and salvation? I believe it does, because our changed life becomes proof of God's power and life. The third lock on the door of Bad Christianity is Power.

3. The Lock of Pride

For the Pharisees to follow Jesus Christ, meant that they had to give up their power, their position and their prestige. We kind of looked this last week and how they loved to sit at the head position of a table and be called by their title. Can a pride within a church be a lock to the kingdom of God? Absolutely. In the Matthew Henry's Commentary he writes:

Repentance was the door of admission into this kingdom, and nothing could be more disagreeable to the Pharisees, who justified and admired themselves, than to repent, that is, to accuse and despise and demote themselves.

The church can have a tendency of looking at themselves more highly than they ought. Some almost have a spiritual elitist mentality, almost like the Pharisees who would walk on the other side of the street when they saw someone they though could infect them. We find a great example of this in the story of the great Samaritan. It's a story of how a Samaritan takes care of a man who is beaten up. Look at how the religious men respond to the sight of the beaten up man in **Luke 10:31:**

31 “By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.*

The church even judges its own. We keep pointing out each others mistakes and instead of loving and accepting the person we cast them away. Jesus even said it himself about the religious people in **Luke 6:42**:

2 How can you think of saying, ‘Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.*

One of the great ministry lessons I have learned, both through good times and bad, has been that the church is comprised of imperfect people. It doesn’t matter who you are you are not perfect so stop trying to be perfect. But **in our imperfection lies the beauty of God’s perfection.** That is what gives us hope – despite who I really am, God covers my flaws and weaknesses with his grace and mercy.

The Pharisees refused to open the door for people to find Jesus Christ. Because of their traditions and ceremonialism, because of their ignorance and unwillingness to be teachable, and finally because of their refusal to relinquish power and control, they missed the greatest opportunity to come alongside the church and really turn this world upside down for Christ. The same can be said about us today. If we aren’t careful, we may be presenting a bad gospel of compliance, of self-righteousness, of meaningless activity, instead of being the doorway to the most incredible message of love and hope this world will ever hear.

Are we a lock or a key today? Do people find Jesus through us or are they discouraged to find him through our lives. In the words of Paul against the Pharisees in **Acts 13:10** tells us:

“You son of the devil, full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good! Will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord?”

What are we, a lock or a key? Will people find grace, truth and transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit in this place? My prayer is that we swing wide the doors of heaven and call out to the great harvest at hand and point them to the one who saves. Let’s pray!