

8 Ways to Be a Bad Christian

Make Big Deals Out of Small Things and Vice Versa

Matthew 23:23-24

This morning I want to look at the sixth way to be a bad Christian. We have so far seen that bad Christianity makes Christianity a Burden, Serves others in order to be seen, Shuts the door on people seeking grace, it converts people to a legalistic faith and, last week we saw that it follows the letter of the law but not the Spirit of it.

It is very clear that the Pharisees, the religious people of the time of Jesus, had a form of religion and cultural tradition. If we are not careful and heed the words and warnings of Jesus Christ, then the Church in America can become another casualty or heartless, cold and mundane religion. Unless you and I are willing to align our hearts with our actions, we can fall into worthless activity. We may think we are doing good things, yet our hearts can be full of deception and hatred.

Jesus' words come to us today and warn us about such a thing. In the issue of tithing, of giving 10% of what they had to the Temple, the Pharisees were strict observers. Just because they did it doesn't mean that their hearts were in the right place. Look at **Matthew 23:23-24**:

23 "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.
24 Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!**

Just because the Pharisee observed the act of tithing doesn't mean that God was happy with them. They could have cursed God all week long and then brought their tithe on Sunday, they could have mistreated people all week long and then brought their tithe and it would mean absolutely nothing to God.

It's not about giving money is it? It's not about giving up a tenth of everything we have in order to appease God, is it? It is about something more important. It is about doing the right thing with the right heart, with the right goal. Jesus even said it himself about tithing in **Luke 12:34**:

34 Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

Giving is to be connected to your heart. **Everything we do is to be connected to our hearts.** So many things that we do can be meaningless unless our hearts are connected. The Pharisees even gave a tenth of their herb gardens to the Temple, they went through the effort of doing such a tedious act, and yet ignored the "more important" things. **The term "more important things" can be defined in the original Greek as the more**

weightier things – not only speaking of the importance but also in degrees of difficulty.

For many of us there things that are easy for us to do. For the Pharisee, they found it easier to give a portion of their garden than to deal with people. In fact, there is a saying that many people use to describe ministry that states, “Ministry would be great if you didn’t have to deal with people.” So many things would be so much easier if you didn’t have to deal with people. Jesus’ challenge was for them to get out of their religious rut and start making a difference – treat people with justice, mercy and faith.

It requires you and I to see things through the eyes of Jesus. When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus stated in **Matthew 22:37-38**:

37 Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* ”*

People are important to God and yet how often does the church put people down because we don’t like what they are doing, or how they live, or what they stand for? I think it is because it would require too much effort to sit down and listen and spend time with them.

The church can be great at doing weddings, funerals, dedications, serving communion, passing the offering bag, but when it comes to loving people we tend to fail time and time again.

The Three Important Things – justice, mercy and faith are to be observed. This call is very similar to **Micah 6:6-8**:

6 What can we bring to the Lord? What kind of offerings should we give him? Should we bow before God with offerings of yearling calves? 7 Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins? 8 No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Justice, mercy and faith – do what is right, love mercy, walk with God.

1. Justice.

When one talks about justice they tend to think of standing and preserving that which is right or true. But Leviticus brings even further clarification as to justice in **Leviticus 19:5**. The Israelites were corrected time and time again for the mistreatment of people. This text reads:

15 “Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly.”

Listen to some other verses of scripture that speak about justice. In **Exodus 23:6** states:

6 “In a lawsuit, you must not deny justice to the poor.

7 The godly care about the justice of the poor; the wicked don’t care at all.

Proverbs 29:7

*19 ‘Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.’
And all the people will reply, ‘Amen.’* **Deuteronomy 27:19**

*17 Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of
orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.* **Isaiah 1:17**

Justice is about the fair treatment of every person – everyone an equal, everyone important, everyone just as valuable to God. No religious act can be more important than people. No religious stance can be more important than people. No point can be made before the value of the person. We may not like everything we see in people, but we have to treat them as God’s creation, as the one God loves. Is it easy? Some of the things that carry the most weight of importance also carry the most weight of effort.

2. Mercy

Mercy is defined as compassion. I like the Webster’s definition of compassion – “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” Passion in action. You can’t see someone in need and not do something about it. That is why Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**:

1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.*

To the Pharisee, they were so wrapped up in their religious traditions and rituals that they neglected one of the most important creations of God – people. They no longer stood for the fair treatment of people, instead they worried about sitting at the head table. They no longer showed a heart of compassion for people in need, instead they worried about staying clean and uncorrupted thus isolating themselves, refusing to be involved. A preacher once wrote these words about this verse:

If we stand against sin, but we have no love for the sinner then it’s useless. If we say that we stand for justice and what is right, but have no compassion to benefit someone who is downtrodden then it’s useless.

Many times Jesus was moved with compassion. It's great for us to be evangelistic. If we could only be more evangelistic! It's great for us to care about people's spiritual needs and meet those needs for them. But if we try to do this, but we are not moved to compassion for the people, then we will fail.

Too often the world perceives that we are not really interested in them. We are not really interested in their needs and problems. We just want to get them saved. We have a way that we call evangelism: soul winning. And we're so interested in winning souls, that we forget that Jesus also loves these people's bodies. Jesus wants to save people. Jesus cares for people. And he has called us to be agents of his love here on the earth. In **Hosea 6:6** God tells us:

6 I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.

The ministry of helping people is more important than any religious activity. It was easier for the Pharisees to give a portion of everything they had, including their herb garden, than it was for them to minister to people. Finally, the third important thing that Jesus was talking about in our text was faith.

3. Faith

For the Pharisee it was easy to look the part instead of play the part. Again, when we look at the term "hypocrite" we find that it refers to "a stage actor". When we watch movies there are times when an actor or actress play the part so well that you wonder if it is real or not. A good actor will make you forget that they are one. Jesus wasn't interested in whether or not they looked the part, but he was more interested in is a living faith.

Faithfulness is consistency. Faithfulness is integrity. Faithfulness means that what I say or hear on Sunday it what I practice throughout the week. Faithfulness is that what I do in public I do in private. Faithfulness means that the spirituality that is put on display is the real spirituality that rules in my life.

We can sure look the part at times and yet lack love and integrity. In **Hosea 6:4**, God's complaint of the Israelites was clear.

"O Israel and Judah, what should I do with you?" asks the Lord. "For your love vanishes like the morning mist and disappears like dew in the sunlight.*

The hardest part of Christianity is not just doing Christian things – the hardest part is being a Christian no matter what the circumstances and requirements, because of our love for God. Bad Christianity look can look good yet deep down is nothing more self-preservation. **The call of God is to be more than image – to be hearts to respond to civility, compassion and integrity.**

Does that mean that tithing isn't important? No, even Jesus said it himself in verse 23, "you should tithe." But remember it is to be connected with your heart. What good is money if it isn't used to help or provide for people, or used as an expression of gratitude and love to our God? Tithing is just the beginning of warning signs of where our hearts are at before God. The way we treat others and the wavering of our faith also speak of where our hearts are at.

Don't get wrapped up in doing the small stuff out of duty. Don't worry about the image of religion in your life. Don't worry about whether or not people will know you are a Christian. Instead, just let your life speak for itself. You and I are not here to prove anything, we are here to show the life changing presence of God in our lives.

The Pharisees were so meticulous about keeping themselves pure and holy that they missed the heart of God. They strained the gnats, the small flies, out of their water so that they didn't ingest something impure, yet in the end their religious fervency was in the wrong place. **Leviticus 11:20** tells us:

20 "You must not eat winged insects that walk along the ground; they are detestable to you.

Instead, they ended up swallowing a camel. In order to avoid the lesser sin, they had committed an even greater one. There is a similar Arabic proverb that states, "He eats an elephant and is choked by a gnat."

The most important things are to be connected to God and connected to people. Christianity is not about singing hymns or songs, it is not about going through rituals and only going to church on Christmas and Easter, it is not about trying to create a righteous society within a fallen culture, it's not about pointing out what is right and wrong in people's lives, it is about loving God and loving people. It is about the way we treat each other, it is about the way we help each other, and it's about being real on the inside and outside – aligning our inner life with our outer life. That is why James wrote in **James 1:27**:

27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

It is about caring for others. The Pharisees were more interesting in keeping the laws around laws, around laws, that they forgot about the people. There is a quote from Frederick the Great that states:

The more I get to know people, the more I love my dog.

Interacting and loving people will be our greatest challenge. Let's not choose the easy way out by just doing our religious things, but let us show true love for God and our neighbor. Don't try to keep the smallest commandments and in turn make the biggest mistake. For God is calling us to something greater than just a building, something

greater than just people that do religious things, something greater than coming together on a Sunday Morning – he is calling us to justice, mercy and faith. To connect with Him and connect with people around us. Let's pray!