

## Eight Ways to be a Bad Christian

# **Be Easy on Yourself but Tough on Others**

### Matthew 23:29-32

Turn with me this morning to the book of Matthew 23:29-32, I want to finish up our series on eight ways to be a bad Christian. As we look around us, we find that many have a different perspective of the church – from being loving and accepting to being full of judgment and hate, from being something that liberates to something that controls. When they look at us, the people that make up the church, they see us in so many different ways. And yet, is what they see the real deal? Is it authentically real and true to what Jesus Christ intended for it to be?

As we have gone through this series, I am convinced that the church has projected an image of religion, they have fallen away from grace and have adapted the trap of the Pharisees – performance - “If I just do the right thing, or say the right thing, maybe God will still love me and accept me.” We can never earn the favor of God – it is a free gift from God. **Performance will only lead to image and image will lead to hypocrisy because the reality is that we are incapable of doing the right thing all the time.** For all have fallen short of God’s expectations, yet with the salvation of Jesus we can come just as we are and experience love and acceptance like no other.

We have projected an image of religion instead of proclaimed the idea of restoration through a relationship with God – one enforced, one welcomed. We don’t want to be a place that is known for it’s religion, we want to be known for our love and acceptance, and for the life changing presence of God, who can come into our lives and change us from the inside out.

This morning I want to look at the greatest of the eight ways of being a bad Christian and that is in the issue of self-righteousness. **One of the greatest traps of the Pharisees was that they couldn’t see themselves for who they truly were.** In all of their efforts to remain pure and holy on the outside by doing and performing, their hearts forgot the living God. They could not hear the voice of God that was challenging them to humble themselves before him, and to listen to what he was trying to tell them. Let’s look at **Matthew 23:29-32:**

*29 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets your ancestors killed, and you decorate the monuments of the godly people your ancestors destroyed. 30 Then you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.’ 31 “But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started.*

Have you ever known people who seem to know everything? You know, the one you can’t talk to without a lecture or the giving of lesson? They esteem themselves so high

that they can't see their faults staring them in the face? They have forgotten who they were and where they came from, and now have taken it upon themselves to police everyone around them instead of themselves. The Pharisees were people like this. We find a great example of this in a parable by Jesus in **Luke 18:10-12**:

*10 "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer\*: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'*

**As human beings we have a tendency to compare ourselves to other people** just like we see here in this text. Comparison can be a form of judgment. And judgment definitely leaves us open to being judged. Paul wrote in **Romans 2:1**:

*I You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things.*

Paul's point – you are just as bad as anyone else, you are no better. We have all sinned, we have all fallen short of God's standards and the only thing that can save us is the love of God. The church is not a place where we are to point out each other's faults. This is not the place to proclaim pure and holy behavior. This is not the place to see the acceptance of God as a mark of superiority or righteousness. This is to be a place of humility, of love and acceptance, of support and prayer, of inspiration, of forgiveness and grace, of truth and peace.

**God hasn't put us on this earth to set the standard, to enforce the standard or to proclaim the standard. Instead, he has put us here on earth to show how full of love, how full of forgiveness, and how full of grace he really is.** It is about God and his accomplishment on the Cross of Jesus Christ, and not about being good enough. I believe that when people are pointing out your faults and sin, it is merely a smoke screen for their own faults and sin.

I believe that those who proclaim a Gospel of "do's and don'ts", the "Should News", don't even do what they proclaim. **The true hypocrites are those who enforce things that they don't even keep themselves.** Just like the Pharisees we read of in the time of Jesus.

Now, you may be asking yourself, "What does all of this have to do with our text this morning." Quite simple – the Pharisees couldn't see their sin and were more interested in the sins of others than their own. Throughout history God has sent men and women to proclaim the words of God, men and women who would warn Israel when they were disobedient.

In fact the term prophet means “mouthpiece”. God spoke through these men and women and yet Israel turned against them. In **Jeremiah 2:30** it says:

*30 “I have punished your children, but they did not respond to my discipline. You yourselves have killed your prophets as a lion kills its prey.*

As God would speak through his prophets, the Jewish people would reject and even set themselves against them. In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees stated that they wouldn’t commit the same mistake of their forefathers and that they would receive the future prophets or “voices” of God. Yet, very crime they accused their ancestors of, they were about ready to commit themselves. Before them stood the ultimate prophet, the ultimate voice of God – God in the flesh. In the Matthew Henry’s Commentary he writes about this and states:

We often think, if we had lived when Christ was on the earth, we would constantly have followed him, we would not have despised or rejected him as they did then, and yet today we have Christ speaking to us through his Spirit, through his word and his ministers, and he is still no better treated.

**Many state how foolish and sinful some of the people in the Bible were, we even state how foolish and sinful people are today, and yet the reality is that we are just as bad as anyone else.**

Of course, as human beings we are easier on ourselves and tough on others. We are easier on ourselves because we are a self-centered people – which doesn’t make it right. Instead, just as we saw in the parable of the Pharisee comparing himself to others, we should be like the tax-collector in the same story. **Luke 18:10-14:**

*10 “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer\*: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ 13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ 14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

“I am a sinner, show me mercy.” **1 Timothy 1:15** Paul writes:

*15 This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all.*

This morning, as we come together, we are all in the same boat. One sin is not more sinful than the next. As a church we are all sinners on a level playing field. For us to

compare ourselves to others is to reject the unique process of growth and development that God has begun in our lives. For us to compare ourselves to others is only another form of self-righteousness. For us to compare ourselves to others is a smoke screen of our own issues and challenges that God wants to help us work through.

**Bad Christianity compares themselves to others while good Christianity commits themselves to Jesus.** We are to let Jesus show us our sin in a loving and compassionate way, he is capable of speaking to us about our own issues without someone coming along and pointing it out. Instead, let us heed the words of Paul in **Romans 1:12**:

*12 When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.*

**As we come together as a church we need to find courage in each other to live out our faith another day.** We need to speak of the greatness of our God, we need to proclaim his great love, we need to remind each other that nothing is too difficult for our God, and that he has created us to be with Him. We are to come together, side by side, with humility declaring the mercy of our God and the hope he has placed within us.

There are far to many things to do than for us to go around pointing out each others faults so let us leave that to the Ultimate Judge, Jesus. Instead let us allow love and acceptance to rule in the place and let Jesus do the rest. Let's Pray!