



# Independence Church Of Christ

*Sharing The Freedom That Is In Christ*

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Lesson For Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## **Unintended Pharisees: Revealing and Redeeming the Hypocrite Within**

*“And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your 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. (Matthew 7:3-5 NLT)*

Rarely does a disciple of Jesus see a spirit of judgment and legalism in him or herself. In other words, it is easy to spot a Pharisee, unless, of course, you are looking in the mirror. So how do we discover and deal with the Pharisee inside us?

### **Revealing the Pharisee**

Soon after coming to Christ, I was *discipled* (taught about truly living the Christian life) by a graduate student at the University of Texas who attended our church. He often countered my Christian arrogance with pithy rhetorical questions that helped me see the hypocrisy and arrogance of my positions. As I recall, he was the one who, when I stated *I loved <a particular nemesis> just enough to go to heaven*, replied *You think that will work for you, huh?* That one statement stopped me dead in my tracks and changed my attitude forever going forward.

As a teenager, you can imagine that I found that, and other quips of his, quite challenging. I didn’t understand it all then, but I especially didn’t understand how one can be a Christian and not take it seriously.

I wondered about others who called themselves Christians, *“So, you believe a man was totally dead on Friday, and then on Sunday, He’s more alive than he had been on Thursday! But that doesn’t change everything about what you value and how you live?”*

### **The reality is that the pharisaical spirit often hides in fields of high expectations.**

I noticed a significant disconnect between belief and lifestyle among many who claimed to be Christians. As I began trying to follow Christ closer, I started noticing that not all believers love the Lord with the passion and intensity I thought I had — or thought they should have. This became a source of frustration to me.

Along the way I would start a Bible study while in high school, but it sometimes seemed that no one was as committed to it as I was. By college, I was a youth minister, and still felt more committed to the process than everyone else. This frustration continued into several other phases of ministry over the next few years.

As I moved into roles where I was teaching from the pulpit, I found that I was not alone in my frustration. Many preachers were feeling the same way. The reality is that the pharisaical spirit often hides in fields of high expectations, and we pastors are often the source of those expectations.

As preachers, and church leaders in general, we are often disappointed with the spiritual journey of many of those in our care. We don't understand why they don't take the faith as seriously as we do. We often get to thinking that they do not truly want to grow in Christ. "*Why? Why is no one else as committed as we are?*" we utter in frustration.

At this point we must stop, look in the mirror, and ask ourselves, "*Wait, why was I putting myself above others, wondering why they weren't measuring up to my standard of passion and intensity in discipleship?*"

### **High Expectations of Judgmentalism**

So how can we know when high expectation becomes judgmentalism? Part of the issue with preachers is that we have followed God into this crazy high-requirement thing called ministry. That proves how serious we are about our commitment, right?

High commitment is measured in our life by what we are willing to give up in pursuing Christ. We literally throw ourselves into the task. And we see the call to discipleship not just for a select few, but we imagine a world where all believers would sacrifice everything to advance the kingdom. But in my situation, there was an aspect that could be traced to damage in my own heart and soul.

### **Pharisees Get Bitter**

I found myself becoming religiously bitter and started looking down on others who didn't "*measure up*". It grew to the point where I would even verbalize the frustration eating away at my soul. "*Man, I don't get this. You're not walking with the Lord. Here I am walking with the Lord. Why don't you get serious about living the life?*" At least that's how I would have articulated it when I was younger. Perhaps by the time I got older I only *thought* it because I was smart enough to not say it out loud. But I still felt it.

### **Passion and Its Problem**

Passion in us often leads to our disappointment in others. Disappointment leads to frustration. Frustration leads to anger. Anger is expressed in an attitude of spiritual superiority and leaning hard on others. And along the way, without even recognizing it, a disciple becomes a Pharisee.

The challenge is to recognize the connection and avoid the downside of the passion. The connection is clear — *people of passion wonder why other people are not as passionate*. It happens in every area of life. However, in the Christian life, the downside is that we can often become judgmental at those who lack our passion.

### **Redeeming the Pharisee**

I wonder how Jesus dealt with the issue — seeing their lack of commitment so evident among His disciples. And perhaps that is the answer. After all, while we are comparing ourselves to others, we need to remember that none of us measure up to Jesus. And no one expects us to.

That's the key — Jesus gives us grace and calls us to grace, and that's the answer to the problem of *phariseeism* in my heart. Passion is good — becoming pharisaical is not good.

Grace extends to those who struggle, who are not as serious as they should be, and who don't measure up. If we see who they are in Christ, rather than who we wish they were as growing Christians, it changes our view. Furthermore, we need to recognize that growth takes time. Maturity is not the seed, it is the harvest, and it is a journey. But we tend to forget that.

### **Different Kind of Pharisee**

I have been a vocal critic of the Pharisees in New Testament Scripture, in the Church of today, and in Christianity when taken as a whole. I probably will still do that when appropriate. But what has surprised me is how my own pharisaical attitudes are just as real and often unrecognized in my own life.

May I, and may we, show grace to those on the way, regardless of who people are in Christ, where they are on faith's journey, and the progress they may be making.