

The Great Divide: The Religious vs. the Follower!

7 Characteristics of Religiosity

Luke 18:9-14

INTRODUCTION

Last week we discussed the topic ‘So you think God can’t use you?’ addressing the reality that God wants to not only save us, but to use us in His service. Discussing this topic turns our way of thinking for many of us upside down because we didn’t see a lot of examples of this growing up in Church.

Sometimes I wonder if what we call ‘church’ actually is the church. I don’t mean this in the sense of doing more, but in the reality of what the Bible says a follower of Jesus is to be. I saw the work of the Lord alive in a treatment center in ways I’ve never seen in God’s people in a church. We grow up experiencing church in certain ways or traditions, but many of those ways aren’t Biblical. Not even close! Sadly, many of us grew up with Pharisees as our examples rather than authentic Followers, and it makes our discipleship now really confusing because it makes us question everything. Many of us who are attempting to follow Christ have so much to unlearn so that we can follow our Savior.

We must first note that Christianity, according to the definition of religion which is a ‘sect of beliefs,’ is in fact a religion, but when I speak of the ‘religious’ today I’m directing it more in the direction of religiosity not mere being a member of a religion.

A recent article concerning how Christians today reflect more of the Pharisees of Jesus time than the early followers is below:

In a new study, the Barna Group examined the extent to which Christians in the U.S. display the actions and attitudes of Jesus as opposed to the actions and attitudes of Pharisees. Researchers developed 20 agree/disagree statements and presented them to more than 1,000 study participants to determine how closely they resembled Christ or the Pharisees.

Jesus-like actions included listening to others tell their story before witnessing, choosing to often spend time with non-Christians, and influencing multiple people to consider following Christ. Jesus-like attitudes included seeing God-given value in everyone and feeling compassion for those who do not know God. Pharisaical actions included telling people that God’s rules are paramount in their lives, avoiding spending time with homosexuals, and preferring to serve people who attend the church rather than those outside of it. Attitudes like the Pharisees included refusing to take responsibility for those who keep doing wrong, feeling grateful to be a Christian when observing others’ failures and flaws, and feeling it necessary to stand against those who are opposed to Christian values.

The survey found that 51 percent of those surveyed qualified as tending toward self-righteousness rather than Christlikeness. Just 14 percent represented the attitudes and actions consistent with those of Christ. About one-fifth of Christians surveyed (21 percent) are Christlike in attitude but like Pharisees in action. Evangelical Christians were slightly more likely (23 percent) to be Christ-like in attitude and action, but were also likely to be Pharisaical in attitude but Christlike in behavior.

David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group, commented on the creation of a “Christ-like” scale: “Our intent is to create some new discussion about the intangible aspects of following and representing Jesus. Obviously, survey research, by itself, cannot fully measure someone’s ‘Christ-likeness’ or ‘Pharisee-likeness.’ But the study is meant to identify baseline qualities of Jesus, like empathy, love, and a desire to share faith with others — or the resistance to such ideals in the form of self-focused hypocrisy. The statements are based on the biblical record given in the Gospels and in the Epistles and our team worked closely with a leading pastor, John Burke, to develop the survey questions.”

“Many Christians are more concerned with what they call unrighteousness than they are with self-righteousness,” Kinnaman also said. “It’s a lot easier to point fingers at how the culture is immoral than it is to confront Christians in their comfortable spiritual patterns. Perhaps pastors and teachers might take another look at how and what they communicate. Do people somehow get the message that the ‘right action’ is more important than the ‘right attitude’? Do church leaders have a tendency to focus more on tangible results, like actions, because those are easier to see and measure than attitudes?”¹

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else: “Two men went up to the temple complex to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee took his stand and was praying like this: ‘God, I thank You that I’m not like other people —greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, turn Your wrath from me —a sinner!’ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

I. The Religious depend on works vs. the Follower depends on Grace

Luke 18:11-12

The Pharisee took his stand and was praying like this: ‘God, I thank You that I’m not like other people —greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’

Ephesians 2:8

For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— not from works, so that no one can boast.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

John MacArthur

There are basically only two kinds of religion in the world: those based on human achievement and those based on divine accomplishment. One says you can earn your way to heaven; the other says you must trust in Jesus Christ alone.

¹ <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/167523-u-s-christians-are-more-like-pharisees-than-christ-new-study-suggests.html>

II. The Religious manipulate God's Word for their own end vs. the Follower submits to its authority!

Luke 6:46-49

“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do the things I say? I will show you what someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn’t shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The river crashed against it, and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction of that house was great!”

Blaise Pascal

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.

Matthew 15:1-6

Then Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem to Jesus and asked, “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they don’t wash their hands when they eat!”

He answered them, “And why do you break God’s commandment because of your tradition? For God said:

**Honor your father and your mother; and,
The one who speaks evil of father or mother
must be put to death.**

But you say, ‘Whoever tells his father or mother, “Whatever benefit you might have received from me is a gift committed to the temple”— he does not have to honor his father.’ In this way, you have revoked God’s word because of your tradition.

Richard Baxter

Naturally, men are prone to spin themselves a web of opinions out of their own brain, and to have a religion that may be called their own. They are far readier to make themselves a faith, than to receive that which God hath formed to their hands; are far readier to receive a doctrine that tends to their carnal commodity, or honor, or delight, than one that tends to self-denial.

III. The Religious goes through the motions, but their heart isn't in it vs. the Follower seeks authenticity!

Matthew 15:7-9

Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said:

**These people honor Me with their lips,
but their heart is far from Me.
They worship Me in vain,
teaching as doctrines the commands of men.”**

Deuteronomy 4:29

But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.

William Booth

I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost; Christianity without Christ; forgiveness without repentance; salvation without regeneration; politics without God; and Heaven without Hell.

James H. Aughey

Our religion is not Christianity so much as Christ. Our gospel is the knowledge, not of a system, but the saving knowledge of a personal Savior.

IV. The Religious focus on looking the part vs. The Follower tries to live the part.***Matthew 23:2-7***

“The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it. But don’t do what they do, because they don’t practice what they teach. They tie up heavy loads that are hard to carry and put them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves aren’t willing to lift a finger to move them. They do everything to be observed by others: They enlarge their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love the place of honor at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by people.

Matthew 23:25-28

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence! Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so the outside of it may also become clean.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Romans 13:14

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Martin Luther

Men are not made religious by performing certain actions which are externally good, but they must first have righteous principles, and then they will not fail to perform virtuous actions.

V. The Religious minor on majors and major on minors vs. the Follower tries to keep the main thing, the main thing!

Matthew 23:23-24

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. These things should have been done without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain out a gnat, yet gulp down a camel!

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

G.K. Chesterton

Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.

VI. The Religious are never satisfied vs. the Follower rests in Christ

Luke 7:31-35

“To what then should I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to each other:

We played the flute for you,
but you didn't dance;
we sang a lament,
but you didn't weep!

For John the Baptist did not come eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

Matthew 15:17-19

“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

**VII. The Religious may have religion but not Jesus vs. the Follower
has Jesus and all of the Kingdom of Heaven!**

Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?’ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you! **Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!**’

Adrian Rogers

I believe that a great number of people are going to die and go to hell because they're counting on their religiosity in the church instead of their relationship with Jesus to get them to heaven. They give lip service to repentance and faith, but they've never been born again.

Matthew Henry

If men's religion prevails not to conquer and cure the wickedness of their hearts, it shall not always serve for a cloak. The day is coming when hypocrites will be stripped of their fig-leaves.

CONCLUSION

A.W. Tozer

Religion today is not transforming the people - it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society - it is descending to society's own level and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smiling accepting its surrender.

Bono

I often wonder if religion is the enemy of God. It's almost like religion is what happens when the Spirit has left the building.