

(The Full Gospel) 7. How God Exposes Pharisees in the Church

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of showing mercy and compassion to others, and warns against the dangers of Pharisaism and judging others.

Scripture: Job 42:7, Proverbs 31:8-9, Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 6:5-6, Mark 3:5, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 15:11-32, Luke 16:19-31, John 9:2-3, Ephesians 4:26

Topics: "Pharisaism", "Compassion for Others"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the danger of Pharisaism within the church, highlighting how Jesus expressed anger towards the indifference of the Pharisees to human suffering, as seen in Mark 3:5. He urges believers to distinguish between Christ-like anger, which is directed at injustice and indifference, and sinful anger, which is often self-centered. Poonen warns against the tendency to judge others based on external appearances and encourages a deeper devotion to God that manifests in love and mercy towards those in need. He illustrates this through biblical examples, including the parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Job, stressing that true spirituality is measured by our compassion for others rather than our religious activities.

Transcript

"Jesus looked at them angrily, for He was deeply disturbed by their indifference to human need." (Mark 3:5 - TLB).

This incident occurred when Jesus entered a synagogue once, and saw a man with a withered hand, and then saw the synagogue-leaders waiting to criticise Him if He healed the man.

Jesus was never angry when people spat on His face or called Him names such as, 'insane', 'Samaritan', 'Satan' etc. But He was angry when people were indifferent and hardhearted towards human need, and when they hindered others from being healed of their 'witheredness'.

We are commanded to "be angry without sinning" (Ephesians 4:26). To be angry without sinning is to be angry about the things that Jesus was angry about when He was on earth. All other anger is sin. We must never be angry at the way others treat us or our families. But we must be angry at the way Pharisees treat others in the church in an evil way.

"You should defend those who cannot help themselves. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice." (Proverbs 31:8, 9).

To be angry when people are hardhearted towards other poor, helpless people - that is Christ-like. But to be angry when people are hardhearted towards you or your family - that is demonic. We must distinguish clearly between Christ-like anger and Satanic anger.

The religion of the Pharisees consisted mainly in going to many meetings in the synagogue, and in praying and singing and preaching at the top of their voices, and perhaps in clapping loudly and waving their hands etc., etc., - in order to impress men (Matthew 6:5, 6). There are multitudes of Christians like that today too. But our spirituality is never measured by the decibel-level of our singing or of our praying in public. It is measured rather by the depth of our devotion to God and the intensity of our concern for the needs of those around us.

The divine nature is LOVE. The more we have of unconditional love, the more we have of true godliness. There are many people all around us who are withered (weak) in some way or the other in their lives. And Jesus observes our attitude towards them and tests us through them.

God uses the sufferings of godly people to expose the wickedness of those who judge them.

Once when Jesus' disciples saw a man who had been born blind, they asked Jesus whether the man's blindness was the result of his own sin or of the sin of his parents. Jesus replied that it was neither (John 9:2, 3). The disciples had been influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees that sickness is the result of sin in a man or in his parents. Jesus is always angry with people who make such judgments on others.

The Pharisees in the synagogue must have felt similarly about the man with the withered hand. They must have felt that they themselves did not have withered hands because they were "holy", and because they had fasted and prayed and tithed! That other man was probably sick because he had not paid his tithes regularly! Or perhaps it was his parents who had sinned.

Children are not Punished for their Father's Sins

It is a very common misconception among many that God punishes children for the sins of their parents. Many believers too hold this heathen idea. And they think they have Scriptural backing for their belief. "For," say they, "does not the Lord say that He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9).

Yes, the Lord does say that. But if you read carefully, you will notice that the Lord says that He will punish only the children of those who HATE HIM - not the children of sincere believers who slip up and fail.

But that statement of God's was misquoted by the legalists in Israel. They used it as a hammer to beat others with, and to condemn them. And so, 1000 years after God had spoken those words on Mount Sinai, He had to correct its wrong interpretation through the prophet Ezekiel.

He says in Ezekiel 18:2: "Why do people use this proverb: 'The children are punished for their fathers' sins?'".

God went on to correct the wrong impression that people had, and told them, "The son shall not be punished for his father's sins, nor the father for his son's. The righteous person will be rewarded for his

own goodness and the wicked person for his wickedness." (Ezekiel 18:20).

That was clear. But the legalists continued to flourish in Israel and to influence the thinking of the people to such an extent, that when Jesus came to earth, 500 years later, His disciples, even after spending so much time with Him and absorbing His teachings, yet asked Him whether that blind man was suffering for the sins of his parents!!

Pharisaism does not die easily!! We are born with a tendency to judge others and to put the worst construction on their misfortunes.

Job's Sufferings Tested His Friends

Look at the story of Job. Why did God's "anger burn against" Job's three preacher-friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (Job 42:7). Because they were not right in what they had said about God.

Yet, if you read through the book of Job, you will find that there was not one thing factually wrong, in all that they had said about God, in their sermons to Job. Everything was accurate.

On the other hand, if you read what Job replied to them in his bitterness and self-pity, you will find that Job accuses God about many things. Only occasionally did he speak words of faith. Most of what he said about God was utterly wrong and evil.

Yet at the end of it all, God says that Job had said the right thing about Him, and the three preachers had said the wrong things.

Where were these preachers wrong?

They were wrong because they had judged Job by saying that the loss of his property, children and health was God's judgment on him for some secret sin in his life. Their so-called "discernment" was totally wrong. They had judged a man of God unrighteously by external appearances; and God's anger burned against them to such an extent that He asked them to go and ask Job (the man they had wronged) to pray for them, if they were to be forgiven.

Have you ever done what those three preachers did? If so, be sure that God's anger burns against you too. The safest way is never to judge others. The secret things belong to God. Leave them for Him to judge.

And why did God ignore and overlook Job's many evil words?

First of all, because God saw the uprightness of Job's heart, and recognised that many of Job's hard statements were the result of the pressure he was facing due to his sickness and sorrow. They were not what Job really meant in his heart. Yet what Job said was wrong.

But God could finally forgive and ignore Job's words on a righteous basis, because of one reason: As soon as Job realised his folly, he "RETRACTED his words" immediately (Job 42:6). And they were immediately blotted out from God's presence, so that what was left on the record now were only the good words that he had uttered.

Such is the power of God's forgiveness and justification to blot out a man's past record. The good news of the gospel is that we can retract and take back the wrong words that we have spoken against God and

men, and they will be blotted out from the record of our lives. But we must do it now, while we are still alive - before we die. The more upright we are, the more quick we will be to do it.

In the record of Job's words, all one can read now are words like:

"The Lord gave me everything I had, and they were His to take away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord....Shall we receive only pleasant things from the hand of God and never anything unpleasant....Even if he kills me, I will trust in Him....I know that my Redeemer lives....He knows every detail of what is happening to me....I am nothing. I lay my hand upon my mouth in silence....I loathe myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 1:21; 2:10; 13:15; 19:25; 23:10; 40:4; 42:6 - TLB).

These are all good words. And these are all that the record contains.

But you may say that Job said a lot of other words too. They may be in the book of Job in the Bible. But God says, "Show it to me in My record of Job's life in heaven". And you look - and you can't find even one of the evil words that Job spoke, written there. They have all been blotted out. Such is the result of true repentance and cleansing.

How good God is, and how marvellous is the way He justifies us.

Have you spoken words against God? Confess them to God and ask Him for His forgiveness now. He will justify you immediately.

Have you spoken evil words to men - even accidentally, or under pressure? Confess them to the people concerned immediately, and ask them for their forgiveness. You cannot be justified if you don't ask men for their forgiveness. It doesn't matter whether they forgive you or not. If they don't forgive you, their lack of mercy will bring the merciless judgment of God on their heads on the final day (James 2:13). But you would have cleared your record by asking for their forgiveness.

If you have sought to make peace with some Pharisee, and he doesn't want to make peace with you, your responsibility is over. You don't have to grovel at his door forever trying to get him to forgive you. No. Leave him alone, and let God deal with him. You can forget about him.

We all know that Job was sanctified through the sufferings that he went through. That was the main purpose of all his sufferings. But there was a by-product too: God used the sufferings of righteous Job to reveal the wickedness of the religious people who visited him.

They accused Job without knowing the truth - just like many people accuse righteous people today. Most accusations that people make are based on hearsay, and rarely on the basis of first-hand knowledge.

Jesus NEVER judged anyone on the basis of hearsay (what His ears heard). But He was even more radical: He never judged anyone on the basis of firsthand knowledge either (what His eyes saw) (Isaiah 11:3). There are very, very few believers in the whole world who are as radical as Jesus was, in this matter.

Pharisees Watch others Closely to Judge Them

In Mark 3:2, it says that when Jesus entered the synagogue that day, His enemies "watched Him closely". Pharisees are always like that - they watch the lives of other believers very, very closely in order to find some fault or the other in them.

They watch what the sisters are wearing, to see if their sarees conform to the "simple standard" that believers are expected to live by. They watch to see if there are any ornaments on their bodies or any lipstick on their faces. They watch other believers to see if there is a TV set in their houses, or any other mark of worldliness. They watch the children of others to find some fault in them. Even if they say nothing, they judge with opinions in their minds. They listen carefully to what believers say, in order to catch them in some wrong word.

And the more angry you are with, or jealous you are of another believer, the more closely you are likely to watch his life, to find some fault in him. There may indeed be some trivial fault in his life, or in his wife's satee, or in his home, or in his family. But God will use it to expose the wickedness of your own heart.

God uses the weaknesses and failures of godly people to expose the wickedness of those who judge them.

The Lord says, "Among my people are wicked men who lurk for victims like a hunter hiding in a blind. They set their traps to catch men. Their homes are full of evil plots....Should I sit back and act as though nothing is going on?" (Jeremiah 5:26, 29 - TLB).

The Pharisees, "plied Jesus with a host of questions, trying to trap Him into saying something for which they could have Him arrested" (Luke 11:54 - TLB). On another occasion, "they sent other religious leaders to talk with Him and try and trap Him" (Mark 12:13 - TLB).

The descendants of those Pharisees "who watch others closely" are found in abundance in Christendom today. Let us be "wise as serpents", as we move in their midst, "as lambs among wolves" (Matthew 10:16).

One of the quickest ways to become a first-class Pharisee is by starting "to watch other believers closely".

If you want to avoid being a Pharisee, finish once and for all with watching others closely - for that is never done with a good motive, to help them, but always with a view to judge them.

We cannot however, get rid of Pharisaim merely by eliminating from our lives those few characteristics of Pharisaim that we hear others speak of in the meetings, or that we read of in HIDDEN TREASURES. No. The list is endless. Unless we allow the Holy Spirit to deal with us radically, we will never be free. We can eliminate one symptom of Pharisaim from our lives, and still have the disease itself within us.

Have you ever had the experience (even once) of the Holy Spirit showing you some aspect of Pharisaim in your own life, that you had never heard of from another brother's ministry?

If not, I would say that you are not walking the new and living way. You are living by the tree of knowledge of good and evil - good and evil revealed to you by another. Some brother has got light on himself and he shares that in the meeting and you get light. No doubt, you are upright and you get rid of that one thing that was spoken of. But you are living by a second-hand knowledge of good and evil - and that always brings death. You need to learn to live by the tree of life (the Holy Spirit).

The Wounded Man was a Test to the Passers-By

Mercy is a very important antidote to Pharisaim.

Being merciful to others means more than just forgiving those who harm us or do evil to us. It means doing good to others in need.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus explained what "mercy" meant (Luke 10:25-42 - see the use of the word "mercy" in verse 37).

There we read of a Bible-scholar who questioned Jesus on how to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied that it was by loving God wholeheartedly and by loving one's neighbour as oneself. But the Bible-scholar (like many Bible-scholars today), "wanting to justify his lack of love for some kinds of people" (verse 29 - TLB), asked Jesus whom the word 'neighbour' referred to. His self-justification identified him straight-away as a Pharisee, and Jesus replied to his question with an illustration.

In the parable, we read first of all of a priest (an elder in God's house) ignoring the beaten man on the roadside. He saw human need there and was indifferent to it. Perhaps he felt the man was being chastened by God for some secret sin in his life. Or perhaps he found fault with the man for walking down that road without any company late at night. He was exactly like the three preachers who preached to Job. How quick we are, when we see people suffer to attribute that suffering to all types of wrongs that we imagine that they must have done, instead of helping them. How indifferent we are to human need! "I was hungry and you never gave Me anything to eat," the Lord says to us, "I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink. I was naked and you never clothed Me. I was sick and you never visited Me. You just sang songs to Me and preached sermons to Me, but never helped me in My need."

That priest was more interested in getting to the meeting in Jerusalem on time, than in helping a suffering human-being. Remember that a lot of people who are on time for all the meetings finally go to Hell.

After that, a Levite (a brother in God's house), also passed by and he too was tested by God. And he failed the test too. He also wanted to get to the meeting on time, and was indifferent to human need.

These two religious men wanted to get to the meeting to hear God speak to them. Little did they realise that God had already spoken to them on their way to the meeting - and that they had turned a deaf ear to Him. They never heard God tell them that their songs and their prayers and their religion were all worthless, because they were indifferent to the sufferings of a needy man whom they had encountered on the way.

God uses the sufferings of godly people to test the hearts of those who see them suffer.

None of us can throw a stone at these two religious men, for at some time or the other, we have all behaved like them. If we do see ourselves in the Levite and the priest in the parable, then let us repent, and seek to be radically different in the coming days.

We need to recognise that, like the priest and the Levite, we too have been placed on this earth by God, to represent Him. And we have to repent of the fact that we have not represented Him aright.

Finally it was a despised Samaritan (a brother, who belonged to another denomination, that did not have such a pure doctrine as the priest and the Levite had) whom God used to help that beaten man.

That Samaritan was not an elder or a preacher. He was just one of those quiet people who go about doing good to others, looking for opportunities to help those in need, without anyone ever knowing about it. He did not judge that beaten man. He realised that that calamity could have happened to him too. And so he was merciful. He denied himself and spent his time and his money to help a brother in need.

There we see what the new and living way through the flesh really is: Christ manifest in the flesh is LOVE manifest in the flesh. It is MERCY manifest in the flesh. It is GOODNESS manifest in the flesh.

The Prodigal Son's Failure Tested His Elder Brother

In the story of the prodigal son, we see yet another example of an elder brother who is completely indifferent to his brother's need (Luke 15:11-32). All that he does is judge his backslidden, younger brother.

If you are an elder in a church, and a brother in your fellowship has backslidden or fallen away, you need to ask yourself why you were so insensitive as to not know about his slipping down, until he actually fell away. Why did you discover his backsliding only after it had become public knowledge to everyone else in the church? How is it you never warned him earlier? It is you who need to repent of your insensitive and hard heart first. And the reason for your insensitivity could be that you yourself are occupied most of the time with your own interests and your family's interests and the good opinions that others in your church and that your elder brothers elsewhere have of you. As a result, you have had no time to think of the needs of your flock.

And when that brother has fallen away and reached the level of the pigs, what do you say then? Do you say, "I knew that would happen. I told him when he left the church that it would go badly with him and that he would end up with the pigs. See what has happened now". You gloat over the fact that that backslidden brother is in a terrible condition, and that you yourself have been proved right!!

There is far more Pharisaism in our flesh than we realise. We are most of the time, far more interested in being proved right than in helping others. Jesus never came to earth to be proved right. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. Do we see how unlike Him we are?

Do you see how Satanic your spirit is - far different from the father-heart of God - when you delight in seeing a brother among the pigs The father was not delighted when his son was among the pigs. He wept. That is how God feels towards backsliders. And every true father in the church will grieve like that. But, as in Paul's time, even today, the church has countless teachers, but not many fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Little do you realise that God has used your brother's backsliding to reveal the evil condition of your own heart. It is you whom God is testing when your brother backslides.

"Behold I am against such shepherds", says the Lord (Ezekiel 34:10).

The same applies to a husband/wife who is insensitive to the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of his/her wife/husband.

Lazarus' Condition Tested the Rich Man

Why did the rich man (at whose gate the poor beggar Lazarus sat), go to hell? Because he was indifferent to human need. The fire he faced in hell was the fire of the wrath of God - the same fire of God's wrath that burned against Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and that burned against the Pharisees in the synagogue when Jesus went there (Luke 16:19-31).

The rich man may have judged poor Lazarus, saying that there must have been some secret sin in Lazarus' life for him to be so destitute and helpless in life. He must have felt that he himself had been

blessed with material wealth and good health only because God had found him faithful. Little did he realise that Lazarus' condition was a test for him. He kept on deluding himself until one day he woke up in hell. What a shock he must have got then when he saw himself in hell along with the bishops who had deceived him in the temple and the synagogues, with a false religion that consisted only of rituals without Divine love. His shock must have been even greater when he saw that the man whom he had despised all his life - Lazarus - was actually seated in paradise.

But he was not the only rich man who has thought like that. There are many rich believers today who think exactly like that. They think their money, their health and their large pay etc., are all indications of God's blessing on them, and they are indifferent to the needs of others around them who are suffering. Little do they realise that God is testing them through other godly believers around them who are suffering.

There are many, many surprises that religious Pharisees are going to get when they get into eternity.

The more we have understood of God's truth, the greater the danger there is of our becoming Pharisees. Those of us who have had the privilege of hearing the purest and most Scriptural doctrine that anyone is preaching in this country today, are most in danger of becoming super-Pharisees above all the other Pharisees in other denominations.

God uses the sufferings of godly people to expose the wickedness of those who are indifferent to their suffering.

The Woman Caught in Adultery Tested Her Accusers

When the Pharisees brought the woman caught in adultery to Jesus to be stoned, God used that woman's sin to expose the wickedness of the hearts of those Pharisees (John 8:1-12).

God uses even the sins of fallen sinners to expose the wickedness of those who accuse them.

If we don't hear the word of Jesus speaking to our hearts constantly saying, "Judge not. He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone", we will end up with that crowd of Pharisees finally, and be eternally cast away from Jesus' presence.

Remember that Jesus was never against sinners. He was only against Pharisees.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-full-gospel-7-how-god-exposes-pharisees-in-the-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net