

-80
2/20/21

THE DANGER OF BEING RELIGIOUS

Text: James 1:17-27

I. **Intro.**

- A. An opinion poll found that 85% of Americans consider themselves somewhat or very religious
- B. In Jesus' day He was hated by conservative religionist
- C. There is a fundamental difference between Christ and religion

II. **Religion or Christ: is there a difference?**

- A. From the beginning of time, religion has been dangerous
 - 1. The danger of religion can be seen in the first parents (Adam & Eve)
 - a. Their fatal mistake was attempting to be more like God
 - b. Their error was not that they stopped believing in God
 - c. They began believing in a way that was forbidden
 - 2. Their first son, Cain also tried to trust God on his own terms.
 - 3. Saul, the first king of Israel, lost his kingdom because he made a religious error - **I Sam 13:8-14**

4. David got into trouble for being religious – **I Chr. 13:7-14 & I Chr. 15:12-15**

B. Why does God make an issue of what we believe & how we serve and worship Him?

1. God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth - **John 4:23-24**
2. God does not want worship that is done ritualistically and in ignorance
3. All God really wants is for us to know and love Jesus Christ (good religion will follow)

C. Religion can be many good things, but it cannot be a substitute for Christ - **James 1:27**

1. Religion is something to believe and do
 - a. Attending church services
 - b. Singing in the choir
 - c. Showing acts of kindness
 - d. Offering prayers
2. Christ is Someone to know and trust

III. What was religion like in Jesus' day?

- A. Jesus was hated by some of the most religious people in Jerusalem
- B. Jesus did not flatter the religious leaders

1. He left no room for the idea that they were godly men who had just made a mistake about Him
2. He said that if they had known the Father, they would have known Him
3. To their face, He called them hypocrites and blind leaders of the blind

C. A closer look at the Pharisees

1. Respected as some of the most godly and spiritually committed
2. They believed in only one God, and advocated a God-centered life
3. They were separatist, who were determined to protect Israel from being compromised & swallowed up into a Gentile world
4. The Pharisees, however, took some wrong turns

D. Jesus was a threat to religion because He shifted the attention from external matters of religion to inward attitudes of the heart

IV. What were the mistakes of the Pharisees?

A. They settled for looking good - Luke 11:39-40

1. They prided themselves in fulfilling their ceremonial law

2. Jesus knew that the "ritually clean" religion of the Pharisee didn't go below the surface
3. The real problem with man is the inside
4. Religion never gets to the heart of the problem, but deals only with surface issues
 - a. Prayer, bible reading & volunteering for church causes may look good, but it won't fool God
 - b. Jesus said, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh..."
 - c. The Bible says in **Romans 8:8**, "**So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.**"
 - d. Receiving Christ can do what all the religion in the world cannot do
 - e. Religion can change the outside; but only Christ changes the heart (the inside)

B. Pharisees made much of little - Luke 11:42

1. A fault of their religion was to major on minor issues
2. Little things have their place as long as they don't get in the way of the more important issues
3. Their mistake was: in attending to details they forgot to love
 - a. They missed the whole point of the law - **Matt.**

22:37-40

- b. There is no substitute for a heart of love & justice - **I Cor. 13:1-3**

C. Pharisees loved the approval of others - Luke 11:43

- 1. Religion can be one of the biggest ego trips around
 - a. What is more honorable than to be thought of as a good and godly person
 - b. Wouldn't it be better to be thought of as a pastor than a prostitute?
 - 1. Maybe not, Jesus said that something needed to change or the Pharisees would go to the same hell as the godless
 - 2. Jesus reserved His severest criticism for the religious people who used their spiritual reputation to get social attention and honor
- 2. The approval of others is not bad, only when it means more to us than the opinion of God
 - a. Being good at the rules of religion enables us to get the praise of men
 - b. Submitting to Christ is the only way to have favor with God

D. Pharisees practiced hypocrisy - Luke 11:44

1. A common feeling among many churchgoers is a sense of being with people who are not being real
 - a. They put on Sunday clothes & Sunday faces and go through the motions of Sunday worship
 - b. We've all got problems and struggles in life, so lets be real
2. Religion is a cover for the real self
3. Religion has to cover up, since it is powerless to restrain the flesh
4. Rather than humbling ourselves and admitting our need of a Savior, we try to do enough religion
5. In this we hide ourselves from Christ, who offers us His mercy

E. Pharisees deceived themselves - Matt. 23:29-31

1. The Pharisees prided themselves in honoring & building memorials to the prophets
2. The funny thing is that when they met a real one, they wanted to kill Him
3. The Pharisees had fooled themselves because they didn't see themselves as prophet killers
4. They didn't realize that their empty religion actually made them enemies of God

5. The Pharisees had a form of godliness but they denied the power thereof.
6. Religion cannot restrain the self-centered flesh, only Christ can change the human heart

F. Pharisees took away the key of knowledge - Luke 11:52

1. One of the greatest dangers of religion is that it not only imperils us but others also
2. How did they take away the key of knowledge?
 - a. By replacing the Word of God with tradition
 - b. By trying to discredit Christ
 - c. By distracting others from having a right attention of the heart

G. Pharisees made converts to hell - Matt. 23:15

1. The Pharisees were setting up their converts for a terrible surprise
2. In matters of ultimate & most extreme importance, religion offers hope where there is no hope
3. Atheist are probably in a safer place than the person converted to religion
4. The unbeliever is not apt to think that he has made peace with God
5. The religious person wrongly thinks that they know the way to heaven

6. Religious people, like the Pharisees and their converts,
are headed for a terrible awakening

Conclusion:

- A. The Bible is full of religious practices that point us to God or
provide a way to show our relationship to Him
- B. Religion is worthless if we are depending on external actions to
make us right with God
- C. What will it be for you: religion or Christ?