

We are in some unprecedented, extraordinary times as a church. There are things we want to continue to do, but they will need to adapt to our situation. I want to continue to finish our series: *Lessons from Old Testament Biblical History and Characters*.

One goal that I have had in my teaching is to anchor you to history, especially biblical history. One of the elements of sound biblical interpretation is context – which include historical context. God did not give us a collection of nice stories about people and events. He gave us an accurate record of His working in history. There is a flow/timeline of events and people, things happening around the events, before and after the events all which are meant to affect our understanding of the truth communicated to us. My desired goal in all my teaching is to show you how things “fit together” and correlate with other biblical truth.

Last week: **The Silent Years – Between the Testaments**

- The Silent Years refer to a **430** year block of time between Malachi and John the Baptist, between Old and New Testaments. During this time God is silent, meaning He is not speaking to His people **through prophets**. God’s **sovereign** direction the affairs of men is still very active as He moves men and nations to the “**fullness of time**” (Galatians 4:4), when He would send forth His Son.
- The Silent Years were a time of spiritual declension among God’s people which led to an **outward, hypocritical religion**, but without real spirituality or righteousness with God. Groups of religious people formed during these years which form the background to understanding Jesus and the New Testament. Hear the words of Jesus – following the Silent Years:

Matthew 15:8; *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”*

Matthew 16:6

Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Luke 12:1

... beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

Matthew 23:13

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ...

Hypocrisy arises out of the sin nature of man; the Pharisees did not invent it. People who are non-religious or who worship other gods can be hypocritical. What developed during the Silent Years was an institutional religion that claimed to worship Jehovah but was characterized by self-focus and hypocrisy. This what Jesus rebuked.

In the Dispensation of the Church – we still struggle with self-focused, hypocritical, religion. Traditional or Contemporary, it doesn’t matter, we can all be like the Pharisees. That is what Jesus was warning about.

It is essential that we as Christians understand hypocrisy! I have been given definite instruction to **lay aside** hypocrisy, 1 Peter 2:1, and to live my life **without** it, 2 Corinthians 6:6; 1 Peter 1:22; Romans 12:9. Both these commands necessitate an examination of my life; actions, words, thoughts, and heart.

It is essential that I understand the **leaven** of hypocrisy. It spreads, it is contagious, it influences others including our children, grandchildren, friends, and church family.

Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites!

1. The **appearance** of “**spirituality**” was more important than the reality of it. Matthew 6:1, 2, 5, 16
 - The praise of men was more a concern than the praise of God. Matthew 23:5-12; John 5:44
 - Pleasing **man** was placed above pleasing **God**. cp. 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:4; Ephesians 5:10

- They practiced spiritual disciplines “to be **seen**”, doing things so others would **think** they were “spiritual.” Their **reputation** before men was their controlling concern.
 - They practiced the correct “**forms**” but they were empty in God’s sight. Theirs was a “hollow holiness.” cp. 2 Timothy 3:5
2. Their “righteousness” was based on a strict adherence to **externals** neglecting consideration of matters of the **heart**. Matthew 23:25 -28; Matthew 5:20 ff; Luke 18:9; Philippians 3:9;

Matthew 5:20

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

- They were “**legalists**”, obeying the letter of the Law but not the heart of it, thinking that their obedience made them righteous with God. *We can become like that when we become satisfied with what we are doing and our adherence to certain rules or standards, to the neglect of our heart.*

We can become insistent that **others conform** to the externals but not be concerned about **their heart**. We can occupy ourselves with the externals and **neglect** the internals.

Example for consideration:

Our “walk with Christ” may become all about following the standards and forms of religion. If we take away the forms (like church attendance), what remains of your walk with Christ?

Consider the difference between the externals and internals:

- Though they **hated**, they did not consider that sin because they didn’t actually kill. Mt. 5:21 ff
- Though they **lusted**, they didn’t consider it sin unless they actually committed a physical act. Mt. 5:27 ff
- they followed the “letter” of their laws, but not God’s **intent**. Mt. 5:31ff; permanency in marriage. Mt. 5:33ff; **honesty** in speech. Mt. 5:38ff; non-retaliatory spirit. Mt. 5:43ff; real love for those who do not love me.

3. They “drew nigh with their **words**, but the heart was far from God”, Matthew 15:7-9a.
- They could talk about spiritual things, but their words did not match the reality in their heart. It is possible for us to “learn the talk” or “sing the songs”, but what I am saying does not match what is going on in my heart.
4. They had a greater skill at **discerning** the **sin** of others than their own sin. Matthew 7:5
5. They could discern the things of the **world** but not the things of God (eternal, spiritual). Matthew 16:1-3
6. They fussed over the **little things** and neglected the **important**. Matthew 23:23-24
“magnified the insignificant, minimized the essential” MacArthur