



TIME OF GRACE®

Skeptical Faith: Aren't Christians Hypocrites?

Study Notes

Summary

Jesus had some harsh words for the Pharisees and teachers of the law at his time because they were pretending to be something they were not. He could read their hearts and see their hypocritical thoughts. God sees what's in our hearts too—the times we are also hypocrites. And that's why Jesus is such a great gift to us! Because of him, we are forgiven, declared to be God's children, and heirs of heaven.

- A hypocrite is someone who _____.
- **Matthew 23:1-13:** ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. ¹³ Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!”
- **Genesis 2:25:** Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.
- **Matthew 23:37:** Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

Points to Ponder

1. Read all of Matthew chapter 23. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees and teachers of the law things like hypocrites, snakes, a brood of vipers, and blind guides? Why is this sort of attitude dangerous for believers?
2. Like the teachers at Jesus' time, we sometimes forget what it means to follow Jesus. There are many examples of things we can become legalistic about. And these can turn us away from the important things we actually need to focus on. Can you give any examples?
3. Can you think of times when you've portrayed yourself to be something different on the outside than you are on the inside? As a child of God, where does your identity come from? From what you do or what others think of you?

Homework for Next Week

Read Romans 1:19,20; 2:14,15; Hebrews 11:3; Ecclesiastes 3:11.

Time of Grace Ministry
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Matthew 23:1-13; Genesis 2:25; Matthew 23:37
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When I was five years old my family moved from the state of Illinois to the state of Wisconsin. My dad was a pastor of a church in Illinois, and he was moving on to take a new position in a church in the state of Wisconsin. And we ended up moving the day before I started kindergarten in my new school. I'd never gone to school before. It was going to be my first day of school ever. The day after we got into the new town where I've never been, where I knew no one. So, we got into town one day and the next day my parents threw me on a bus as I was wearing my brand-new blue raincoat. I got off the bus, stepped into a classroom with kids that I didn't know, seeing a teacher that I had never met. A very unfamiliar experience, very scary.

So, imagine my surprise when that first week of school I received an invitation to a birthday party. One of the kids in the class invited me to his birthday party. And I didn't know him very well at all but thought that would be a lot of fun, so I decided to go. I went to the birthday party which took place just a few days later, and we had a lot of fun at the birthday party. We played a lot of games. We swam in the pool, had some cake, had some ice cream. And then it was time to open the presents and we all sat down. Everybody brought out the presents that they had brought the birthday boy. And he took the first one and he opened it up and inside was a G.I. Joe action figure toy, very exciting. Now he put that one away, then he took a next one opened it up and inside was a G.I. Joe action figure toy, very exciting not the same one, a different one but still G.I. Joe. He put that one away, took the next one, opened it up and inside was a G.I. Joe action figure toy again, a third one. He put that aside and gift after gift, present after present, I think you know where this is going, it was the same thing, a G.I. Joe action figure toy every single time until he got to the last gift, which is the one that I brought for him. I did not get him a G.I. Joe action figure toy. Yeah, he had the present in front of him. He opened it up and inside was the model airplane kit that my mom and I had bought for him the previous day. I knew I didn't quite fit in with everybody else, but I didn't think too much of it. He said, "Thanks." He seemed to like it, and we went on, we had a great time with the birthday party.

And I didn't think any more of it until a couple of days later when we were back at school. A number of the other boys who were at that same birthday party they came up to me and they said, "Hey Jeremy, do you know that the only reason you were invited to that birthday party was because your dad is the new pastor of our church and he thought that he kind of had to invite you? But none of us really wanted you to be there. We would have been okay if you weren't there." And then they walked away. You know what kind of person I met that day? A hypocrite. Now you might think that seems kind of harsh to call a five-year-old boy a hypocrite. But a hypocrite is basically just somebody who pretends. That's it. Somebody who pretends.

And for a number of days, he and a lot of the other boys at that party had pretended that they were happy to see me, pretended that they were having a good time with me, pretended that they wanted to be around me. They were pretending. By definition, a hypocrite.

And you can find those unfortunately at birthday parties that five-year-olds attend. You know where else you can find them? In church. You can find them in church. In fact, the fact that there are hypocrites in church is one of the reasons that many people choose not to come to church. Because it's often a painful experience when you meet one. And they look at the church, and they look at hypocrites they see, the people who are pretending to be one thing when they're really not. Pretending that they're up here, or over there, and or in comparison to where you are they're higher, or greater, or smarter, or better. And it turns people off to the church. They don't like to look inside any place, much less the church, and see hypocrites.

And they're not alone, because Jesus doesn't like seeing hypocrites in the church either. He meets up with some hypocrites in Matthew chapter 23, "Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 'The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So, you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long. They love the place of honor at the banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace and to be called 'Rabbi' by others. But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he's in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!'"

If you have ever stepped into a gathering of people who call themselves Christian and have been made to feel that you don't belong here, that we don't want you, that you're not one of us, that until you become like this, we won't love you, there's not an explanation that I can give you that will make you feel better about that experience. Because there's no good explanation for it. You were the victim of a hypocrite, maybe many hypocrites. And I'm sorry that happened because it shouldn't have. But of course, the church isn't the only place where you'll find hypocrites, we really find them in any number of places.

I have a very close friend who told me something that he would do at work a number of years ago. He worked in the HR department of his company, and he was responsible for choosing who the company was going to hire into the new positions that were open. And he said that when he would sit down with the interviewees it was pretty predictable how the process would go from the outset. You know, he asked them the normal questions and they had their normal response rehearsed about why they thought they should be a good fit, and why they thought they would excel in this position and why they should be hired. And everybody had that part down pretty well. But after all of that talk, talking about the resume and the credentials and work experience and family and lots of different things, then my friend would take out a blank piece of paper and

he would slide it across the table to the person who was being interviewed. And he would say to them, "I would like you to write down the username and password for all of your social media accounts and for any dating website that you belong to." And before I go any further, I feel like I need to give a disclaimer here. I am not condoning that, and my friend now would not condone that. And also, the company that he worked for many, many years ago would not condone that either. This took place when social media was kind of a new thing and businesses were still trying to navigate their way through how they were supposed to use all of this new information that was circulating on the internet in a way to hire and identify the best candidates. I think it might even be illegal now to do what he was doing. But it wasn't back then, and again I'm certainly not condoning it. But he told me that it was an interesting experience because it did accomplish something, at least in the moment. He said that as he slid that piece of paper across the table he knew pretty much right away even before they said anything, even before they wrote anything down, who was worth hiring. He could tell by the reaction on their face. If they looked really scared, he thought that was probably a good indication that they were hiding something. That there was something about their life, something about their past, something about their present, something about who they were that they didn't want the company to know. And if they looked scared, if they looked timid, if they were really, really hesitant to share that kind of information about who they were, he thought that's probably a good indicator that this person wouldn't fit in this work environment.

Now, if you were to think about that person who is being interviewed for that job, and if I were to ask you who that person is, What would you say? Would you say that person is the individual that you see on their resume? The person who is sitting in that chair, probably dressed pretty nicely, talking very politely, groomed very, very well, is that who they really are? Or maybe you would point to their social media feed, and you would say, "No, that's who they really are." The social media feed where they're usually succeeding at something or they're usually doing something really well, where they're usually smiling and having a good time because those are the kind of things that people typically share on their social media feeds. Would you point to the social media feed and say, "Well, that's who they are." Or maybe would you point somewhere else? Would you point to who that person is when they think they're not being interviewed? Or noticed by anyone? Who that person is when they're all alone and they think nobody is watching or evaluating them?

How many people in the world right now know you? Like everything? Exactly who you are and what you've done and what you struggle with? And if the answer is not many, or no one, then that leads to another important question. The question then is does anyone really love you? Do they love you as you really are, no pretending? If you consider those questions and if you don't come up with too many people who really truly know you and love you exactly as you are, you're certainly not alone. I think that's probably the norm in the world. In fact, if you go in the Bible and if you look for an example of two individuals who knew each other so well and loved each other exactly as they were you have to go back to the Old Testament. Way back in the Old Testament to the very beginning of creation when they were really, literally, the only two people on the planet, Adam and Eve. At the end of Genesis chapter two there's an interesting verse in there, where it says, "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

When I'm taking a young couple through pre-marriage classes and prepping them for what they need to know about how to be married in a good way, how to keep their marriage founded on the rock-solid love of Christ's love for us I read that verse to them and I ask them, why do you think that verse is in the Bible? If you were God, why would you put that verse in the Bible? Of all the verses out there is that one that you would definitely want everyone to know? And they struggle with that for a little bit typically. Most often it's a question that they had never thought of and it's a verse that they don't consider very often. Nobody really picks that one for their wedding verse. "The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame." But I pushed on. I pushed on the question a little and I asked, why do you think that verse is in the Bible? And sometimes they give an answer and sometimes they don't. But then I ask them to just think about practically what it would've looked like with Adam and Eve in that situation. Adam and Eve were both fully exposed in front of the other person, fully exposed and yet they didn't feel ashamed.

They didn't feel ashamed. I mean, think about that from Eve's perspective. She's standing there, fully exposed in front of Adam and she is not thinking, "Oh, I wonder what he thinks of me? Am I beautiful enough? Am I the right shape? Am I the right size? I wonder if he's comparing me to anybody else on the planet?" Of course he wasn't, there was nobody else on the planet at the time. But she wasn't thinking any of those things. She looked at Adam and by the way Adam looked at her you know, he saw everything. She was confident that, "He loves me just as I am." And the same is true in the opposite direction. You picture Adam, standing there fully exposed in front of Eve. She can see everything and he's not thinking, "I wonder what she's thinking about me? I wonder if she likes what she sees?" No, not at all. By the way Eve was looking at him he felt no shame, no reason to be embarrassed, no reason to cover anything up. Because by the way Eve looked at him, he knew, "She sees me, and she loves me."

Fast forward just one chapter in the Bible to Genesis chapter three and you see something entirely different. When Adam and Eve had both crossed the line that they knew they shouldn't have, then they covered themselves up, then they started hiding. And then God came walking through the garden, and God found them. He knew where to look, he knew where to find them. And he asked them, he said, "What are you doing? Why are you hiding?" And Adam said, "Well, I hid because I was afraid. I was afraid of what you would think of me if you knew the truth." But of course, Adam discovered in that moment what we also know, it was something we also know about God, and that is God knew where to find him. God already knew the truth. He already saw everything, and Adam really couldn't successfully hide anything from him.

Just like the Pharisees couldn't hide anything from Jesus. You may notice in the verses that we read earlier that Jesus was able to identify the motives of their hearts. On the outside they looked like they were these great religious fanatics in the good way, that they cared very deeply about God's laws, and they were the high standard that people pointed to and said, "Why can't you be more like that?" But Jesus was able to get into their hearts and read their hearts like an open book and say, "I know the real reason you're doing this. You're doing this because you want to look good." And you want to make yourself look good compared to everybody else around you which means your goal is to make them look bad. And that's not love. That's not even good. And they weren't able to hide that from Jesus, just like we aren't.

Whatever is in your life, whatever is in your past, whatever you are most scared to bring up in front of anyone, God already knows. He knows. We can't hide it from him. We also can't hide who we are from one another as well as we like to think that we can.

I have one story to illustrate that from a number of years ago. A church where I served, we were rehabbing one of the buildings on our camps. We were working together with another ministry to make a community youth center in a very troubled neighborhood. And it was in the process of construction and demolition, and it was a big mess. We were on our way to making it into something better, and one night it was broken into. Somebody broke one of the windows and they were able to open up the door, and they went in, and they stole something. Now, there were a lot of things inside the building, there were a lot of tools, there were a lot of supplies, a lot of things that were worth a lot of money but that's not what they stole. There was also a big case of Powerade, you know, the sports drink. A big case and that's what they stole. They stole the Powerade. They left all the tools, left all the things that they could've sold for a lot of money. But I guess they were thirsty, they went for the Powerade, and they took all of it.

The next morning the pastor who was overseeing the whole project, he was cleaning up, going through the building and he decided to take a walk around the campus, a walk outside and he started walking down the sidewalk. And just a ways down the sidewalk he saw a bunch of kids hanging out and they were all drinking something. And guess what they were drinking? Powerade. And he thought, "I bet I know where those Powerades came from." And so he walked up to the kids and he said, "Hey guys, how you doing? My name is Pastor such and such and I work at this congregation and with this youth center." And then he asked them, "Where'd you get those Powerades?" They said, "Oh, we bought them at the gas station." He's like, "Ah, the gas station. Well, that's good." They said, "Yeah, yeah, we got it at the gas station." 'Well, that's great, that's great.'

And then he said, he said, "Have you guys, have you seen that building up there? Have you noticed that building where there's a lot of construction going on?" And they said, "Yeah, I guess so." And he said, "Do you know what that building is going to be?" They said, "No, we don't." He said, 'I want you guys to know that we're making this building for you. Like all that work, it's being done for you. Okay, we know the world is a hard place, it's not always safe, and we want to give you at least one place in this neighborhood where you can feel safe, where you can walk in any day and people are going to be there to care for you and help you with your homework, and play games with you, board games, video games, card games. Lots of different things. We'll go on field trips every once in a while, we'll learn a lot of new things.' He said, "I want you guys to know that that building over there is yours. It's for you." And then he said to them, "I wonder if you guys can do something for me? I need your help watching over that place. Because last night somebody broke into it and they took something. And that just hurts you. And we don't want anyone to hurt you, we want to be there for you as best as we can, and so I'm going to need your help watching over the place. Can you do that for me?" And they say, "Yeah, I guess we can do that." They talked for a little bit more and then they said, "Goodbye."

And the Pastor went back to the campus had some more work to do with cleaning up and couple of hours later he was still cleaning up and there was a knock on the front door. He walked up to the front door and there was one of the kids that he had been talking to earlier on the sidewalk. And the kid looked at him and he said, "Pastor, I have to tell you something. I broke the window. That was me. I got us into the building and when we came in and we saw the Powerade I was one of the kids who took it. I'm sorry."

A couple of hours later in the afternoon, the board of directors for this ministry was meeting on campus for their regular meeting. And the pastor onsite walked in, and he wasn't alone, that same boy came with him. And that same boy stood in front the board of directors and said the same thing. He told them what he had done, and he looked at them and he said, "Will you forgive me?" And do you know what happened next? This little boy found out just how powerful it is to find someone in this world who had seen him at just about his worst, or at least knew him at his worst, but still loved him. They forgave him, they hugged him, they welcomed him back. They didn't renege on what the pastor had promised him, that the place was for him. A place where no matter who he was or what he had done, he was going to be loved.

And do you know what else? Do you know who else in the world saw someone like that? Somebody who could see us at our worst and still give us his very best love? The hypocrites, that Jesus was talking to in Matthew chapter 23. In this chapter where he does not hold back, he goes on to call them, "Hypocrites and brood of vipers and snakes and blind guides." You go through the whole chapter but then you get to the end of the chapter. And Jesus says this, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

I want to take you back to the birthday party just for a moment. So, I went to the birthday party and everybody got the birthday boy a G.I. Joe. I didn't, I got him the model airplane kit. And a few days later the kids came up to me and told me that they didn't really want me there. A couple of weeks after that the kid whose birthday party it was came up to me. And he said, "Jeremy, I'm wondering if you're doing anything this weekend? I'm wondering if you'd want to come over to my house again?" And I said, okay. And this time it was just the two of us, no other kids, nobody else around. I felt a little pressure to maybe bring a G.I. Joe toy but I resisted. But I walk into his house and he showed me around again, and we walked by his bedroom and as we walked by his bedroom I looked ahead and I saw his dresser and on top of his dresser was something. Do you know what it was? It was a model airplane all put together, from the model airplane kit that I had gotten him for his birthday. I don't know if he liked models. I don't know if he liked airplanes. I didn't ask. But I do know that he looked at me and he saw someone who needed some love, some positive attention and that's what he gave me that day, and I haven't forgotten it.

In this world you will have no trouble finding people who put you down, who want to make you feel worse about who you are in comparison to who they think they are. You'll have no trouble finding people who try to elevate themselves at your expense. So, let the world see something

different. Get to know the world, as broken and as troubled as it and we all are. And love it and love them just like Jesus loves us. Let's pray.

Dear Father in heaven, we're so ashamed that you know everything about us because all of our hearts are filled with so much regret about things that we left undone, good things that we left undone or bad things that we jumped into more quickly than we would have ever imagined. And we can't hide these truths from you. But neither do you want to hide from us the truth of what happened at the cross. We were loved with a great big eternal perfect love that puts us in the arms of our heavenly Father for eternity.

What a great gift you have given us in Jesus. You put us all on the same level. You declare us all to be forgiven. You declare us all to be children of God in a residence of heaven. Thank you for that great gift, and as you have given it to us so freely, equip us to continue to give that gift over and over again and again to everyone around us. In Jesus name we pray, amen.