
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage	Matthew 23:24-28
Supporting Passage	Matthew 22:15-23:36
Memory Verse	1 Peter 2:1
Biblical Truth	God demands more than religious rituals. He wants a genuine relationship with His people.
Context	After being questioned by the Sadducees and Pharisees who were trying to trap Him, Jesus responded by admonishing their hypocritical lifestyles.
Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will understand the meaning of hypocrisy.• Students will begin to value authenticity as a valuable characteristic of God's people.
Prayer Suggestions	<p>As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pray that your students will understand why Jesus could not tolerate hypocrisy.• Pray that your students will become people of integrity.• Pray that your students will seek to live out the truth they find in God's Word.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

The Pharisees were the largest religious group in Jesus' time. They made it their job to ensure that all the religious rules of the day, such as eating the right foods, fasting, and observing the Sabbath, were kept. There were only about 6,000 of them at any one time. They exerted their power by controlling the synagogues. By doing so, they had a profound impact on the general population. The Pharisees hated Jesus and His teaching and often sought to trap Him (Matt. 22:15). Matthew 22 records their attempt to trap Jesus with the issues of the tax to Caesar and Moses' teaching on marriage. In Matthew 23, Jesus condemned the Pharisees' hard-heartedness, legalism, and hypocrisy. In Matthew 23:3, Jesus characterized them as people who do not practice what they preach.

Jesus used a noticeably sharp tongue to rebuke the Pharisees. The woes in Matthew 23:24–28 are set in a context of seven statements condemning the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Importance

This passage teaches that **Jesus is God and Savior**. This passage of Scripture is important for students because it demonstrates Jesus' intolerance of hypocrisy and helps them to identify things Christians do that are similar to what the Pharisees did.

Interpretation

Matthew 23:24 Jesus warned the Pharisees by telling them “**woe!**” (Matthew 23:23). The Pharisees made the mistake of thinking the more rules they made and kept, the more holy they became. Not only did they tithe farm produce as the Mosaic Law required (Lev. 27:30), but they went to extreme efforts to separate leaves and seeds of kitchen herbs and spices—mint, dill, and cumin—to set aside for God one out of every 10 counted (Matthew 23:23). Jesus did not denounce tithing the herbs. He denounced the Pharisees' character. They were unjust, unmerciful, brutal, unforgiving, unkind, greedy, and abusive to others. They had neglected what really mattered to God: justice, mercy, and humbleness (Micah 6:8). Despite all their work, they completely missed the point.

Jesus used exaggeration, a form of humor, to point this out. They would “strain out a gnat” of their drink (tithing herbs and spices), yet still “swallow a camel” (live with ungodly character). Jesus' humor made His point clear: God wants more than religious rituals. He wants a relationship with us that produces godliness.

Matthew 23:25-26 Outward religious rituals do not prove the existence of a right relationship with God. What if you were to clean the outside of a cup and **dish**, but not the inside? Imagine going to dinner at a nice

restaurant. The server comes to the table, and you order your favorite dish—lasagna. Hungry, you can't wait for your food to arrive. As they place it on the table in front of you, the lasagna is in the most beautiful dish you've ever seen. "If this just tastes half as good as it looks," you think. But as you slide your fork into it, you realize that the dish is dirty! Grime, gunk, pasta, and sauce from the previous meal are stuck to the plate. The outside looked clean, but the inside is dirty; when the inside is dirty, the whole dish is dirty.

Jesus used the word "**hypocrites**" to describe the Pharisees. In their day, people viewed them as examples of the Law's standards. Today, we often use the term *hypocrite* for two types of people. Some claim to be Christians but don't live it. Others uphold Christian morals, but do not have a relationship with Christ. The religious rituals of the Pharisees gave the appearance of lives devoted to the Lord, but inside they were spiritually rotten. The two words Jesus used to describe their spiritual condition were "**greed**" and "**self-indulgence**." The Pharisees were guilty of robbing the very people they were supposed to serve to satisfy their own greed.

We must have a right relationship with God for our religious acts to be pleasing to Him. Like the lasagna dish with the stuck-on food, if the inside of our heart is dirty, we aren't clean. When we clean the inside, "the outside also will be clean" (v. 26).

Matthew 23:27-28 Jesus used another illustration that most Jews would have understood. For us to understand it, we need a little background in Jewish Law. When God chose Israel to be His people, He made a *covenant*, or an agreement, with them. In the Old Testament, the Book of Leviticus lists God's instructions to the Israelites about how to live. This was known as the Law, with a capital "L." What these rules said, they did, and God would bless them. But if they didn't follow the Law, consequences would follow.

Everything could be divided into two categories: clean and unclean. Clean things were elevated to the status of holy, and only the holy was permitted to enter God's presence. Things were made holy through a sacrificial ritual or made unholy (and became unclean) through pollution. Most things in their normal state were considered clean. But they could be made unclean through defilement or sin.

Tombs were commonly located along the wayside. To touch a dead body or even a grave would cause a person to become ceremonially unclean (Num. 19:16). This would be a disaster for someone on the way to the Passover Feast. Because he or she would be made unclean, it would disqualify him or her from sharing in the celebration. At festival time during the month of Adar (around March), tombs were whitewashed (plastered with lime) so travelers wouldn't accidentally touch them. This process made the tombs stand out, for the chief intention was to mark them as a warning of uncleanness. A person traveling to Jerusalem could easily see these tombs as they glistened in the sun, looking almost lovely. But the tombs were full of dead bodies. They would defile a person at the touch. Like the tombs, the Pharisees were beautiful on the outside but spiritually dead on the inside. They had no genuine regard for God's Law despite their outward deeds. In the same way, as the tombs ceremonially defiled everyone who touched them, the Pharisees spiritually defiled everyone who followed their teaching.

Implications

The Pharisees acted as self-appointed rule keepers of the religious laws of the day, but most of them had no real relationship with God. Merely keeping religious rules does not please God. Only a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ will please Him. A relationship with Christ produces a holy life. By just keeping the rules, you cannot attain holiness. The Law has no ability to save us from sin. God gave the Law to show us our need for a Savior, so

we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24-25). What are some things students in your group might trust to make them right with God? How can you remind them that only Christ can make them right? Hypocrisy hurts everyone it touches. Jesus said the converts of the Pharisees became twice as much sons of hell as they were (Matt. 23:15). The Pharisees were like “whitewashed tombs” that defiled everyone who touched them. Hypocrisy is contagious. It can infect and cause great damage to a church. How can you encourage students to evaluate the ways their hearts and actions match up? How can you help them realize the ways their actions affect others?

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today's lesson.

Master Teacher Option: Checking for Counterfeit

(10 minutes, moderate set-up)

Students will compare genuine money to counterfeit money.

Bring some real paper money and some “play” money from a game or toy store. Obtain a merchant's pen used to identify genuine bills.

Allow students to handle the play money. Ask: **Would you try to use this at a store or a fast-food place? (no) Why not? (It's fake.) How do you know it's fake?** Hold up a real bill. Ask: **Have you ever seen a store clerk or a bank teller examine a bill to see if it's genuine?** Use the pen and demonstrate how the ink does not change color when marking the genuine bill. Say: **If this were a counterfeit bill, the pen mark would turn brown—and someone would be calling the police.** Ask: **How easy is it to tell the difference between real and counterfeit people? (Sometimes it can be hard.)**

Say: Jesus encountered fake religious people—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Today we will look at what He had to say to them—and us—about being honest and having genuine faith.

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: The Pharisees' and Sadducees' Questions

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will examine Matthew 23:24–28 and discuss the fake religion of the Pharisees.

Use the Master Teacher outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this

passage with students. Download the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Key Study correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Learning Goal: Students will understand the meaning of hypocrisy.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Matthew 23:24-28.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss hypocrisy and authenticity in their relationships with Jesus.

Learning Goal: Students will begin to value authenticity as a valuable characteristic of God's people.

Ask a student to read Matthew 23:24-28. Ask:

- **Can you remember times when you have judged others for some supposed offense—when inside you knew you were guilty of much more serious sin?**
- **Forty-five percent of Americans describe themselves as born-again Christians. Does anything in our culture suggest that some of those polled are lying?**
- **Can you think of anything you have done simply because you felt you had to do it in order to be a Christian?**

Remind students that real Christians do more than follow rules. They have made Christ the Lord of their lives. Lead students to consider whether they have acknowledged Christ as Lord of their lives.

Master Teacher Option: Honest Growth

(10 minutes, moderate set-up)

Students will write ways they can grow spiritually on postcards.

Provide a postcard for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will begin to value authenticity as a valuable characteristic of God's people.

Say: **We've talked about what is real and what is fake, about authentic faith and phony spirituality.** Ask: **How can we tell the difference in our own lives?** (*our motivations, spiritual fruit, relationship with Christ.*) Lead students to discuss specific ways that we can get so caught up in "doing" religious and even good things that we forget to nurture our relationship with Christ. Challenge students to think of one way they can focus on their inner spiritual life (as opposed to their outer spiritual

activity). Distribute postcards and tell students to write the action on their card. Ask students to write their actions as if they were telling them to God. Pray that students will become keenly aware of any hypocrisy in their own lives. Encourage students to keep their postcards in a prominent place (in their car, locker, or bathroom mirror) this week so that they can be reminded of their commitment as they go about their week.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

*Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 34: His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.*

1. As Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, what did He tell two of His disciples to do? (*Lesson 34*)
 - a. To go ahead and let people know He was coming
 - b. To drop and give Him 20 pushups
 - c. To find a colt in the next village that was tied up**
 - d. To prepare food for the rest of the disciples

2. What did Jesus' disciples find in the village ahead, where Jesus had sent them? (*Lesson 34*)
 - a. A colt tied up just as Jesus had said**
 - b. Nothing
 - c. An angry crowd
 - d. A hotdog stand

3. What did the disciples say to the one who asked, "Why are you untying that colt?" (*Lesson 34*)
 - a. We have our reasons.
 - b. The Lord needs it.**
 - c. We're on our way to Jerusalem and need this for transportation.
 - d. He looked so sad.

4. What did people do as they saw Jesus approaching on the colt? (*Lesson 34*)
 - a. They laughed at Him.
 - b. They acted disinterested.
 - c. They ran in fear.
 - d. They spread their cloaks on the road.**

5. What did the Pharisees want Jesus to do with His disciples? (*Lesson 34*)
 - a. To punish them
 - b. To rebuke them**
 - c. To come to dinner
 - d. To take them and leave

The Master Teacher Key Study: The Pharisees' and Sadducees' Questions

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will examine Matthew 23:24–28 and discuss the fake religion of the Pharisees.

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with students. Download the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Key Study correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: Every hero has to have an archenemy. Who was Superman's archenemy? (Lex Luthor) The Fantastic Four? (Doctor Doom) How about Luke Skywalker? (Darth Vader) So, who was the archenemy of Jesus? Students will probably say it was Satan, and that is a good answer. However, explain to students that a group of Jews stood against Jesus for almost His entire ministry on earth. This group was known as the Pharisees. They didn't like Jesus because He confronted their self-righteousness. The Pharisees prided themselves on following all of the Law, including man-made laws that they thought would help them remain pure. Jesus condemned them for being more concerned with their performance in keeping laws rather than worshiping and serving God with their hearts.

1. Fake as straining a gnat but swallowing a camel.

- This passage is a part of the seven “woes” that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees.
- Jesus was trying to help the Pharisees understand that they had completely missed the point of God's Law.

Illustration: Steve Martin is best known as an actor. But before his success he was a stand-up comedian, doing off-the-wall humor that was so ridiculous it was funny. On one of his records he satirized an old love ballad by singing, “It's impossible to suck a Cadillac up your nose, it's just impossible.” Jesus made a similar image in this response to Pharisees who were trying to trip Him up.

2. Fake as drinking from a cup that is clean outside but filthy inside.

- In another metaphor Jesus warned the Pharisees about their hypocrisy. They were like cups washed on the outside but filthy on the inside.
- Although the understanding of hygiene was limited in Roman times, the Pharisees certainly understood that drinking from a dirty cup would be disgusting. Surely they got the point that their inner lives were filthy, regardless of what they looked like on the outside.

Illustration: One of the first essentials a survivor needs is water. Fifteen years ago it was rare to see bottled water in the United States, now everyone uses it. Wouldn't it be foolish, though, to pour clean, pure drinking water into a filthy cup and drink it from that? Jesus thought so, too, but compared the Pharisees to just that kind of tainted utensil.

3. Fake as considering a coffin full of dead bones a beautiful work of art.

- If they still missed the point, Jesus made clear the understanding of His metaphor in verse 27. Outwardly they appeared righteous, but inwardly they were filled with hypocrisy and wickedness.
- No matter how they appeared to others, they were still spiritually dead in their hearts because they were not concerned with their love for God.

Illustration: One of the largest cemeteries in the Los Angeles area is Forest Lawn. Celebrities are buried there in beautiful mausoleums. Similarly, while history has admired the pyramids for thousands of years, the fact remains that these enormous structures really are just massive headstones for the dead.

Conclusion: The Kingdom of God is not a series of rules administered by a group of self-appointed judges, but something bigger—something beyond a narrow understanding of God. Jesus pronounced the woes upon the Pharisees to warn them to turn from their hypocrisy and to warn the people not to follow this form of religion. He is more concerned with the purity of our inner life than the properness of our image.

LESSON 35

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

THE PHARISEES' AND SADDUCEES' QUESTIONS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 23:24-28

Memory Verse: 1 Peter 2:1

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

GENUINE ARTIFICIAL

1. Fake as straining a gnat but swallowing a _____.
2. Fake as drinking from a _____ that is clean outside but is filthy inside.
3. Fake as considering a _____ full of dead bones a beautiful work of art.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you remember times when you have judged others for some supposed offense—when inside you knew you were guilty of much more serious sin?
- Forty-five percent of Americans describe themselves as born-again Christians. Does anything in our culture suggest that some of those polled are lying?
- Can you think of anything you have done simply because you felt you had to do it in order to be a Christian?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found. Dressed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne.”—*Edward Mote*

LESSON 35

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

THE PHARISEES' AND SADDUCEES' QUESTIONS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 23:24-28

Does anyone like being with a fake? Didn't think so. Nine times out of 10, if you were to ask people what the most important characteristic in a relationship is, they might say "trust," "honesty," or "integrity." Whether they are Christians or non-believers, people value authenticity in relationships. You will never hear someone say that they are marrying another because he or she is dishonest or fake. You also will never hear a candidate for president run on a platform of distrust.

Read Matthew 23:24–28. It's likely that although most people in Jesus' day feared the Pharisees, they probably did not necessarily like them or trust them. Most people can identify a fake because eventually their disingenuous nature is going to start to bleed through their thin skin of truth.

Teenagers know the value of having friends who are honest. They learn this from an early age. The struggle is in growing into a person of integrity. Jesus named the problem: Knowing God's commandments and yet choosing to live in disobedience. It's called hypocrisy. Our teenagers will follow our example one way or another. What example are you setting?

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- Most people value honesty, authenticity, and integrity in a relationship. Why is this important to you?
- First, read Matthew 23:24–28. Then ask: To whom was Jesus speaking?
- Why do you think that Jesus was speaking so harshly?
- Why did Jesus have little tolerance for the hypocrisy coming from the teachers of God's Law?
- How does this serve as a warning to us?
- What needs to happen in order that truth will prevail in your life instead of hiding behind an act?