

Steps For The Recovering Pharisee
Stop Withholding Mercy & Grace
Lesson 3

Introduction

1. This is the third of our lessons in a series that is designed to help us examine the pharisaical ways in our lives and make the changes necessary.
2. Today we want to begin by addressing the issue of withholding mercy and grace from those who need it and to whom God deems worthy of it.
3. Working for something and then feeling like you merited it, is near and dear to a Pharisees heart. Earning and deserving (including rewards and punishments) is the matter that makes up a pharisaical life.
4. Unfortunately, these are the very things that hinder us from the enjoyment and appreciation of God and His gifts of mercy and grace toward us. When we feel like we have to work to earn His grace and mercy and then we withhold these blessings from anyone who hasn't worked for it like we have, then we will never be grateful for the free gift of His love toward us.
5. Pharisees get what they deserve, and while that may seem like a lot (holy appearance, praise of men, temporary glory), it never really amounts to much in this lifetime and tragically ends with nothing that will survive the fires of judgment in the next life. While they anticipate rewards, judgment awaits those who do such things.
6. This is a very costly error. As long as we fail to remember that we are not saved from all of our sins by works of merit (but by God's grace), we will continue to withhold God's rich blessings from others whom God wants to bless freely.
7. The result is that we will not be saved and we will not be able to help others to find God's grace and mercy because of our Pharisaic methodology. Let us make sure that we are not guilty of withholding the mercy and grace of God from others.

I. Realize That You Have Received God's Mercy & Grace

- A. We receive the same grace as everyone else.
 1. When we enter into the service of God the reward is the same for us as it is for every other soul who submits to the will of God.
 2. Jesus taught this fundamental truth when he taught the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)
 3. An owner of a vineyard had hired some workers in the morning to work for him, and as the day went on he found that more workers were standing idle, and he hired them as well (even unto the 11th hour). When evening came he instructed his foreman to pay the workers from the ones hired last to the one hired in the morning.
 4. Everything was fine until the ones hired first, who had worked all day, realized that the individuals hired last were receiving the same wage as they were. That is when the arguments started!
 5. For just a moment, let's consider how we would feel if we were in their situation. We have been out in the field all day working hard and then at the end of the day a few others come in and work for the last hour of the day...and they receive the same amount of wages as we do. What is your response?

6. Whatever your response, we are not dealing with physical wages in this parable, but we are dealing with the mercy and grace of God. In all honesty if you turned this employer into the Better Business Bureau they would simply inform you that the employer fulfilled his contract. You agreed to serve him for the wage that you received. Take it or leave it, but do not withhold what the employer wants to give to the others.
7. In this parable, the Lord is the owner, and the workers are His people who have agreed to do service to Him for the blessing of His mercy and grace. Each and every one of us needs these blessings and even though we work for the Lord, we will never deserve or earn His them...it is His wage to us.
8. The mercy and grace of God is His own to give and we cannot be envious just because He is generous. We need to take what He has given and go forth trying to help others to come to the Lord in humble service for the same wage...His mercy and His grace.
9. We have no room to grumble at the Lord, since we and anyone else that receives this wage are but sinners in need of that mercy and grace. We know that the reward of serving the Lord is eternal life while the wages of serving sin and its lusts, is death (spiritual). (See Rom. 6:23)
10. We should not be surprised at the end of the days of our lives if we find that God has given mercy to everyone that has come in faithful service to Him.

ILLUSTRATION:

SHOCKED...

I was shocked, confused, bewildered
as I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
by the lights or its decor.

But it was the folks in Heaven
who made me sputter and gasp—
the thieves, the liars, the sinners,
the alcoholics, the trash.

There stood the kid from seventh grade
who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor
who never said anything nice.

Herb, who I always thought
was rotting away in hell,
was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
looking incredibly well.

I nudged Jesus, “What’s the deal?
I would love to hear Your take.
How’d all these sinners get up here?
God must’ve made a mistake.

And why’s everyone so quiet,
so somber? Give me a clue.”
“Hush, child,” said He. “They’re all in shock.
No one thought they’d see you.”

Judge NOT...

~Be kind. We’re all in this together.~

B. Pharisees are like the first workers in the story.

1. Many of the parables that Jesus told were directed toward the Pharisees. They would have recognized themselves as the first workers in this lesson.
2. They have been working their whole lives to keep their interpretation of the law in hopes of pleasing God. They knew they had earned it, but no one else had worked like they had.
3. They prided themselves in their heritage going back to Moses, the law, and the prophets. They were in charge of holy things and holy places in their mind. They granted or withheld access to these things based on their own personal evaluation of others.
4. In the parable, the poor, lame, blind, leprous, publican and sinner were the ones who came later in the day to serve the Lord.
5. The Pharisees could never accept that what they had worked so hard for, someone else could get for almost nothing, especially someone outside the boundaries of their manmade traditions.
6. They prided themselves in saying they were better than those without the law and traditions. Jesus knew what they were thinking and showed their attitude in the parable through the first workers when they said, “You have made them equal to us”. They were worried about being equal with others around them not only in pay, but in personhood.
7. God’s mercy and grace makes the ground level. Sin in our lives evens the playing field so that mercy is something that we all need. Since God is the giver of this mercy and grace we have no right to dictate who is a recipient of these blessings.
8. The Bible teaches in many places that anyone who turns to the Lord in humble submission to His will through faithful service will be granted His mercy and grace. That is somehow hard for us to understand at times and it is seen in how we often determine who is unworthy of these blessings.
9. Jesus, when He announced the coming of the kingdom of God, made it available to a small band of fisherman and common people. The Pharisees couldn’t stand it. Jesus said His parable was about the kingdom of heaven when he spoke of the vineyard and the workers.

10. None of these people had been following the false traditions of the Pharisees but somehow they were receiving the grace and mercy of God.

II. Recognize The Blessing Of Having God's Mercy & Grace

- A. Imagine you are one of the workers that has been paid for one hour of work.
 1. Now think of yourself as the one who worked only one hour of the day, and then you see the foreman paying those who worked all day, the say wage as you.
 2. Would you wonder if the foreman made a mistake? Would you think (not in dishonesty...but recognizing his graciousness) that you definitely received more than you deserved, but you were simply blessed with the gift of the one in charge?
 3. You see, people who receive more than they deserve, don't go around measuring to see if there is fair business being dealt out between those around them. As a matter of fact, when we are dealing with spiritual things, and we realize that what we deserve is eternal separation from God because of our sin, the mercy and grace of God is something we cherish and want to give to as many souls as is possible.
 4. Jesus (the foreman) said that the words of the foreman were, "Take your pay and go". This is good advice...and we need to appreciate what our Lord has done for us and not only allow Him to give His mercy to others (which is not our place), but help Him to do so.
 5. In Luke 8:18, Jesus said that if these Pharisees were not careful, what they had would be taken from them. Those who have are those who have received something freely by God while the one who thinks he has is the one who has worked and tried to earn spiritual status. To believe in Jesus they were going to have to give up the idea of deserving their pay.
 6. The Pharisees had to lose their false identity as a servant of God, and realize that their sense of worth was given to them by God in His Son, Jesus Christ (mercy and grace [See Titus 3:3-8])
 7. How many times did Jesus say to the Pharisees, "you have your reward already", since they were seeking payment for their good deeds as if they earned it in this life? (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18)
 8. Yet, we do find in the scriptures where our service to the Lord is required to receive the reward of heaven...not on the basis of being deserving, but of being faithful to a gracious Lord. (Eph. 2:8-10; I Cor. 3:8; Col. 3:23-24)
 9. The simple fact is...we have a generous God and all He wants us to do is accept His mercy and grace in submission to His will for our lives.
 10. Pharisees always get what they bargain for (recognition and praise from men)...recovering Pharisees get more (joys of heaven). Pharisees make it there business to measure themselves and everybody around them, while recovering Pharisees have learned to avoid the issue altogether and simply receive with a thankful heart what God gives them.
- B. We need to learn to let God control the wages.

1. Pharisees always want their say in the rules of the game, so that they can guarantee themselves a place in it. If they control the rules (their interpretation of the law) they make sure that they are “in” while undesirables are “out”.
 2. The unofficial laws of the Pharisees (not even in the Law of Moses) were seen on several different occasions in the life of Jesus...especially on the Sabbath day.
 3. Today many Christians have similar lists of laws (traditions) that have absolutely no authority in the NT that God has made with them.
 4. Christians have come to believe that they are Christians completely on whether they do or don't do the things in their lists of laws that they have made. When we pride ourselves on having obeyed our own lists and then we find ourselves condemning those who don't, we had better do some personal examination.
 5. We feel like we have control over spirituality when we interpret the law our way and then when Jesus properly interprets it, we are left to either change and give up control to Him or continue and keep our false sense of control.
- C. Pharisees always change the definition of sin.
1. By slightly altering the definition of sin, the Pharisees were able to draw the line in a critical place, far enough out to cause most to fall short, but not too far to make it impossible for themselves. You could summarize what I said, by saying, “Impossible for most, but possible for some”.
 2. The Pharisees seemed to have a list of big sins and little sins. Let's call them Macro and Micro sins.
 - The Macro Sins are those that can be easily avoided with little human effort and a dash of hypocrisy.
 - *Adultery, Murder, Stealing etc.
 - The Micro Sins are those which the Pharisees made for themselves that nobody knew about (or really even cared about). (See Mark 7:3-4, 9)
 3. The Pharisees were worried about ceremonial washings (hands, cups, kettles, pitchers). WHO CARES? Only the Pharisees! Not only did these traditions separate the Pharisees from the rest of the human race, but they gave the Pharisees a focus on something other than love, mercy and justice...which the Lord said they needed to be involved in to be right with God (the weightier matters).
 4. Just when the Pharisees thought they were somebody for not committing adultery or murdering others, Jesus said they were lusting and committing adultery in their heart and that their hatred was the same as murder.
 5. When dealing with their own lists of laws, Jesus pointed out how they could save a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, but couldn't help a fellow man with an illness or special need on the same day. (Matt. 12:9-12) WHERE IS THE LOVE, MERCY, JUSTICE ETC.?
 6. Jesus called their view of law keeping and sin, “straining out gnats while swallowing camels” This was the way Pharisees engineered sins to a size that they could control while missing the meaning of the deeds, thoughts,

and intents of the heart that motivated them. The Pharisees were petty about keeping their own meticulous set of rules, but in the meantime had broken the fundamental laws of the God of heaven and earth.

7. After all, the Pharisees were on the fast track to God, right. WRONG! They thought they were holy and that the holy things belonged to them, while having the right to interpret the law in determining what sin is and what is not sin. Remember that the Pharisees were called whitewashed tombs! (Matt. 23:27-28)
8. The humble tax collector (sinner) would be justified any day over the self-righteous Pharisee...and that concept angered them (Luke 18:10-14).
9. Here is a thought for us to consider...Pharisees actually wanted others to come to and through them to get to God. We need to be careful about this.
10. Remember the Wizard of Oz...he is like the god of the Pharisees. They make him sound powerful and mighty, but then they go behind a veil to manipulate and control him. What you find is that some little, tiny, nobody was making up his own rules, while the God of heaven has wanted us to come in humble service to Him. It won't be the same if you come before God's throne of grace as it was when you face the Oz god of the Pharisees. (See Heb. 4:16)
11. I am not surprised that the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus. I mean...you seem to have control over everyone religiously through the law you have made, then Jesus comes and gives God's grace and mercy to everyone through the obedience of simple faith in Him. OUCH!
12. When Jesus began to forgive and help fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, Roman soldiers, housewives, children, the blind, the lame, and the deranged etc. The Pharisees would have chose to be left out, if this is what the kingdom of God was all about (See Luke 17:11-21).
13. There are no spiritual stages in mercy and grace...you either have them or you don't. If what Jesus was doing was right, the Pharisees are no longer needed. There are no big sins or little sins...just forgiven and un-forgiven.
14. We need to realize who God is and understand how His mercy and grace are beyond our control, while learning that the only thing we can do is accept His blessings instead of measuring them.
15. When we live each day for His glory and honor we are telling God that we accept our humble position before Him and that we are thankful for His grace and mercy.
16. It is when we realize how unholy we are, that we will be willing to lay down the pharisaical garb and hypocritical actions to let God work in and through us, His will for our lives.
17. But we know what the Pharisees do in this situation...they crucify the Son of God and do not accept the free gift of God's mercy and grace for a law and a personal righteousness of their own.
18. Our worth is not seen in social class and worldly reputations, but rather it is seen in coming down off of our pedestals and seeing ourselves as sinners like everyone else that needs the help of a generous God.

19. Now one final look at the workers who received a full day's wage for one hour of work: Would you see them walking around examining the pay of the others who had worked all day or do you see them as grateful souls?
20. Once you have received mercy and grace, you really shouldn't be concerned when God bestows this on someone else. Give it to the whole world as long you have it to enjoy.
21. If you earned it on the other hand, you care. You are deeply concerned that others who haven't worked as hard as you, have the grace of God.

Conclusion

1. There are only two views through which we can see ourselves. Either we feel we have earned God's grace and mercy through working long and hard. Or we feel we have been called into His service and after serving Him we are being blessed with more than we could ever deserve, and we are thankful.
2. In other words, you are either a Pharisee that thinks that keeping a personal list of laws will bind God to an obligation to pay you, or you are a sinner that has come in humble service to faithfully work for the Lord, who blesses you as a recipient of the mercy and grace of God.
3. Which will it be for you? Are you saved by the grace and mercy of God? Are you thankful and humble or have you become like a Pharisee? If we can assist you in any way to make your life right with God, please let us know how we can help you as we stand and sing together.