

A LOOK AT THE NEW TESTAMENT

Your friend says to you, “I wish I could be as religious as you are. I’m just not very good at that kind of thing.” How would you react?

// *Read Mark 7:1-23*

What is the problem that the Pharisees have with Jesus and his disciples? Can you think of any contemporary equivalents?

How does Jesus react? Why do you think his reaction in verses 6-7 is so strong? How do these words challenge you? Take a look at Isaiah 29:13-14 to unpack things further - what does it add to Jesus words here?

Is there anything in your life in which you know you pay lip service to Jesus, but your heart is a long way from him?

What is going on in verses 9-13? What is so surprising about it?

In what ways might we do the same sort of things as the Pharisees in this passage? Why is it so easy to fall into the same patterns of thinking? What is the solution?

Why is the attitude & behaviour of the Pharisees so wrong, according to verses 14-16? Do you think people around you who aren’t Christians would agree with Jesus? Why/why not?

In what ways are verses 17-23 immensely liberating, as well as being frightfully terrifying? It is sometimes said that being a Christian is a fine line between *licence* (doing whatever you want, because you know you are saved by grace) and *legalism* (thinking you are saved by what you do)? Which do you veer towards most often?

Why is the gospel such good news therefore? How can we help each other to live it & believe it more and more in our lives?

study notes
week eleven

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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WAY IN

Reflection: Take some time to look over the 10 Commandments as a whole in Exodus 20. Which one has impacted you the most? Thank God for all that he has taught you. This last commandment gets under our skin. It probes into our inner desires which have the potential to turn into action if we let them. Pray that God would help you to be honest as you think carefully about how the commandment applies to you.

Complete the following statement: “My life would be so much better if.....” Why do you think that is the case?

Do you think that most people feel that they are good people, or bad? How does this impact the way they live their lives, particularly when they get things wrong?

A LOOK AT EXODUS

// Read Exodus 20:17

What are some of the things that you are tempted to covet that belong to your ‘neighbour’?

How does advertising play a part in this?

‘Do not covet your neighbour’s ... manservant, maidservant, ox or donkey.’ What are some of the equivalents in our culture?

// Read Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus gives us a clear pathway to avoid worrying about the things we think we need. Why is worry so unproductive?

When we are caught up in worry, what does that say about our relationship with God?

What is the positive action that Jesus urges us to take (v33)? What will this mean for you this Christmas? How will this make a difference?

“Once we push God away from the centre of our lives we create a vacuum nothing else can satisfy.” Do you think this is true?

QUOTE TO REFLECT ON

Quite often I will hear legalism and license presented as two ditches on either side of the Gospel that we must avoid. By “legalism” I mean the idea that Christianity is a set of commands which, if you obey them, will improve your standing in the eyes of God and make you a “faithful Christian.” By “license” I mean the idea that because Christ has redeemed us from any curse on our sin, we can “do whatever we want” because our sin is already paid for. I think we should reconsider that polarization, because I think they may be more like stepbrothers than polar opposites.

*“License” is not the polar opposite of legalism, it is simply another type of legalism. **Religious legalists** attempt to overcome that emptiness and shame by conforming to a religious standard which makes them good and acceptable people. They find their fulfillment in knowing they are “good Christians,” because they have obtained a sufficient level of obedience. **Non-religious legalists** attempt to find their fulfillment not by pursuing religious accomplishment, but by pursuing some secular goal—making money, looking good in the eyes of others, etc. They hope that when they have “done enough,” i.e. made enough money, bought enough stuff, obtained the higher position, found enough sensual pleasure, etc., they will be fulfilled.*

Both religious and non-religious legalists operate from a position of emptiness and shame. They both think that they must obtain something in order to overcome that emptiness and shame. Both legalism and license reject what God has declared about us in the Gospel and attempt to build an identity and find fulfillment based on what we can obtain or what we accomplish...The opposite of both “legalism” and “licentiousness” is faith in the Gospel—believing what God has declared about His relationship to us in the Gospel and finding your fulfillment in that. (JD Grear)

Is he right? How does the Gospel overcome inadequate responses to the 10th Commandment?