

BaptistWay Bible Series for February 19: Be Genuine, Show Grace, Be Humble

February 7, 2012

It seems that everyone has encountered "that guy" in life. "That guy" is anyone with the uncanny knack of irritating everyone he encounters. If there's an unsuitable word to be said, "that guy" says it. If there's a peculiar habit that annoys, "that guy" has it. Most of all, "that guy" possesses the ability of choosing to do the absolute wrong thing at the most inappropriate moment.

There's no changing "that guy." He appears to be stuck in his ways. The answer to "that guy" is "Don't be 'that guy'!"

Jesus had "that guy" in mind when he spoke in Matthew 23:1-12. Specifically, "that guy" was the "teachers of the law and the Pharisees" verse 2. They irritated Jesus, to say the least, by living out their faith with a lack of genuineness, grace, and humility.

Righteousness

Jesus warned his followers not to be like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees of their day. In short, these religious leaders were hypocrites, for they taught one thing and did another.

Now, what these religious leaders taught was correct. Jesus acknowledged as much when he said, "you must obey them and do everything they tell you." The basis of their teaching was the law of Moses, and Jesus did not come to abolish the law but fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Of course, Jesus was not giving approval to everything that was taught by these leaders, but he

did accept the source of their teaching-namely, the law.

Furthermore, teachers of the law and the Pharisees made the lives of the average person more difficult through their teachings and practices. Jesus likened what they did to putting a heavy load on a person's shoulder and then failing to help that person in any way. Instead of being examples of righteousness, these leaders had become burdens to the people.

Honor vv. 5-7

Jesus continued his description of the religious leaders by focusing on their actions. Some wore phylacteries, those small wooden boxes that they literally tied to their foreheads or hands. They did this in strict legalistic observance of Deuteronomy 6:8. They also kept the tassels of their garments long in keeping Numbers 15:38-40 and Deuteronomy 22:12. These leaders loved being seated in the important places at banquets and at the synagogues. They also loved being called by the title "Rabbi."

All of what Jesus described was the outward appearance of the religious leaders. Their appearance before others was important in the first century. Holding honor was a cultural value embraced in that time period. "Honor" describes a value system based on public respect and high esteem. To honor someone meant to acknowledge their worth and value. The ancient writer Seneca claimed that honor was desirable in and of itself.

Unfortunately, honor was hollow. It did not display the true worth of a person. It only revealed the public perception of a person's worth. Thus, according to Jesus, the first century world's practice of honor was a hollow acknowledgment of one's true worth.

Authority vv. 8-10

It is easy to misapply these verses, so they must be understood in light of the previous verses addressing honor. Jesus continued to criticize the social

customs of acknowledging a person's authority over another. Titles determined a pecking order of authority and honor in the first century world. Jesus criticized the use of titles in such a way.

The ultimate authority in life is God, and God alone. Jesus, himself, is true teacher of his followers. Of course, Jesus was not giving a new law that forbade the use of any title at all or even the specific titles of rabbi, father, or teacher that he mentioned in verses 8-10.

Jesus opposed the creation of any hierarchy of people who were his followers. No follower of Jesus is greater than another. The Apostle Paul illustrated this teaching by describing the local church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Each part of the body is just as significant as another. No one part is more important than another. Thus, all of Jesus' followers hold equal value and worth.

Humility vv. 11-12

What's missing in the lives of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees? Humility. While these religious leaders sought honor and prestige from other people, Jesus talked about humility. In the first century world, humility was not a virtue. Jesus made it one.

The same holds true today. Humility is not a virtue well-embraced by society, yet an opportunity is open for Christians today. Humility can be major conduit through which the light of Jesus can shine. A Christian distinctive can be humility.

How many Christians today can be described as genuinely humble? How many church leaders should be given the title Pharisee? Jesus' teachings in these verses call all of his disciples to examine how well their outward actions truly match the beliefs that they hold. This is a wake-up call to root out hypocrisy in the church.

After reading these verses, I'm reminded of what my dad would say to me, "Son, don't get too big for your britches." I think he meant that I should not think more of myself than what I really am. My goal is to be a follower of Jesus living out my faith in genuineness, grace, and humility.