

Foolishness of Spiritual Pride

Mark 3:1-6

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Introduction

One of the most puzzling questions that we see in the gospels is the Pharisees' and other religious leaders' irrational hatred to Jesus. This is especially troublesome when we look at Mark's account of Jesus healing a man on Sabbath. In fact, every time the Sabbath issue comes up between Jesus and the Jewish religious people, the Jews walk away with madness and much hatred because Jesus would deflate their own preconceived notions of their own holiness in following man-made traditions that look nothing like the laws that God provided on Sinai. This is the root of the problem...spiritual pride in their own outward practices of their religion.

They see themselves as holy and blameless before the law because they have not committed any acts against it. Even Paul was not immune to this way of thinking when he was a Pharisee before he met Jesus on the way to Damascus.

Philippians 3:4-6 *Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

Despite his own assurance in his own righteousness, God reveals to Paul how much He hated their self-righteous acts. He considers it an abomination.

Isaiah 1:11-15 *"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to Me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹²When you come to appear before Me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of My courts? ¹³Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood."*

Even in Isaiah, when he tells the people what the Lords says, the priests and the people are not doing what He wants them to do. They are guilty of high crime—oppression, thievery, allowing vultures to swoop in and steal from orphans and widows. Because the religious leaders are not acting the way He wants them to act, He refuses all of their religious acts. He will not answer their prayers or acknowledge their "faith".

This is what the Lord requires as we continue in Isaiah:

Isaiah 1:16-17 *Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of My sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

Their outward religion has to match with what is inside.

James 1:27 *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

Two things: True religion is selfless and heavenward living.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the outward religion. He likens a person who spends his/her time only on the outward acts to a sepulcher that gleams on the outside, but inside it is filled with death and filth. Jesus tells the people that to be considered righteous in God's eyes:

Matthew 5:20 *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

What does He mean here? The righteousness that the Pharisees and other religious leaders have are all on the outside actions. They may not be breaking the law from the outside, but their hearts and minds are not of God. To exceed their righteousness, a person has to deal with his/her heart. It is the heart that must be changed. Jesus expounds on this by stating:

Matthew 5:27-28 *You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

It is the heart that needs to be changed...not just the outward acts.

It is on the Sabbath that Jesus exposes the Pharisees' heart—hearts full of spiritual pride. He rips their outward devotions to the Sabbath law (and to God) and exposes their heart's true master.

Mark 3:1-6 *Another time He went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.² Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath.³ Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."⁴ Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.⁵ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*

I. The Challenge (1-2)

- Another time He went into the synagogue
 - Mark (and other gospel writers) did not think it was important to say where or when this happened
 - According to Luke (6:6), Jesus was teaching
 - He was teaching the same message—repentance and the good news of the coming kingdom
- a man with a shriveled hand was there.
 - No name for him
 - No reason given for why he was there
 - Luke (6:6) adds that his right hand was shriveled
 - Most people are right handed
 - Shriveled hand—dead flesh (atrophied); useless
- Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus
 - Who are “them”? Matthew and Luke both say Pharisees and scribes
- so they watched Him closely
 - watched Him closely
 - Intense scrutiny, not for good, but to catch mistakes so they could denounce Him
 - This is sad because they were supposed to be the protectors of the Sabbath

- To see if He would heal him on the Sabbath
 - Matthew adds (**12:10**) that they asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on Sabbath
 - This was a trap question
 - Jews saw healing as work, so healing was forbidden on Sabbath
 - Only healing allowed was for life-threatening situations, but only enough healing that they would be stabilized enough for further healing after sundown
 - To the Pharisees—it was not lawful to heal on Sabbath

II. The Question (3-4)

- Jesus knew what they were thinking (**Luke 6:8**)
 - He knew their motives and reasoning for questioning Him
 - He knew what was in their hearts
 - He knew that their question was not for the spiritual benefit for the people

***John 2:24-25** But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.*

- Jesus tells the man to step forward
 - Interesting that the man did not ask for healing or was he seeking it
 - He trusted Jesus enough to stand in front of everyone (an embarrassing situation!)
- Lawful to do good on Sabbath or to do evil
 - Which one of us is honoring God?
 - Jesus is exposing their spiritual pride
 - He is calling out their evil intention
 - He is calling out their evil desires—He is showing them mercy and grace
- Lawful to save life or to kill
 - He challenges them even further
 - If not to do good...how about to save a life?
 - Irony of ironies because this is what Pharisees were planning
- They remained silent
 - If they say it is lawful to do good and save a life
 - They would not be able to accuse Jesus of any violation
 - Agreeing that his act of healing was good and right.
 - If they say it is lawful to do evil and to kill
 - They would show their own merciless wickedness

III. The Foolishness (5-6)

- He looked around at them in anger
 - One of the few times that Jesus shows His anger
 - Angry at what?
 - Unbelief, their following the apostate religion, spiritual pride
 - Rejection of the gospel, rejection of His grace and goodness
 - They were merciless, compassionless, brutal, hard-hearted, proud, self-righteous
- Deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts
 - Anger mingled with grief
 - Stubborn heart = hardness of heart

***Ezekiel 33:11** Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their*

ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Luke 19:41 *Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.*

Matthew 23:37-38 *O 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. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate.*

- Said to the man, "Stretch out your hand"
 - He healed the man with His words
 - No work was seen from Him!
 - Jesus could have avoided all this and healed the man at sundown
 - He came to prove that He is the Lord of the Sabbath
- He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored
 - This was something that everyone could see
- Then the Pharisees went out
 - Luke records (6:11) that they were furious
 - They lost their minds—irrational anger
 - They were furious because Jesus showed no respect to their religion
- began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus
 - Herodians
 - Not a religious sect
 - These Jews supported Herod Antipas' seat of power (even though he was a non-Jew)
 - Pharisees considered them traitors and Gentiles
 - Yet they were willing to team with them—so Jesus could be dead

Conclusion

This is a horrible reminder of the blindness of spiritual pride against all reality. The contrast between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders is stark; it is the contrast between divine truth and human tradition, contrast between knowledge and madness, contrast between goodness and wickedness, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

That is the reason why spiritual pride kills...they are of the Devil.

John 8:43-45 *Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. ⁴⁵But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.*

The storm clouds have begun to gather on the horizon over the head of Jesus. The storm will build in its intensity until it breaks on Him on a hill called Golgotha where He will give His life. But even in death, He triumphs, paying the price for all our sin, rising from the dead so that we can be right with God!