

Lessons Learned from the Pharisees
"How to Overcome a Contentious Spirit" – Part 2
Mark 7:1-23

Introduction:

1. Many people in life go from job to job, church to church, marriage to marriage, friendship to friendship, etc. Do you know why? They have a contentious spirit. Some people seem to never be happy. Why? They have a contentious spirit.
2. I love Webster's definition of contentious - "exhibiting an often perverse and wearisome tendency to quarrels and disputes."
3. Let's turn and look at **Proverbs 26:21-22. Contentious people:**
 - **Stir up strife** - they always have an issue, an axe to grind, a problem. Somebody didn't do it right, etc. They are always getting people stirred up.
 - **Hurt people** - as they hop from job to job, church to church, relationship to relationship, they leave a trail of blood, and it's not their own; it is everybody else that was **wrong**. Contentious people seldom resolve anything - they run.
4. You must be honest with yourself and ask, "Do I tend to have a contentious spirit?" You will never overcome it until you first get honest with yourself about it.
5. The Pharisees had a problem with this in Jesus' day. They were always stirring something up and in the middle of contention.
 - **Example: Mark 7:1-5**
 - What was the big issue here? Jesus' disciples eating without washing their hands.
6. The Pharisees gave a facade of being very religious, but they never experienced the blessing and joy of true spirituality. They were a miserable lot, and one of the main reasons was that they possessed a contentious spirit.
7. Let's look into this Bible text and draw out three facts that a person must come to accept if they are to ever overcome a contentious spirit.

First fact: My preferences are not Bible.

1. In verses 3-5 the Pharisees are all worked up over this thing. Think about it - washing hands, cups, tables, pots, etc. Who cares? Only the Pharisees. Only their exclusive group. It was one of their petty little preferences.
2. It was tradition, not Bible. Look what Jesus said in verses 6-9.
3. This same thing happens in churches today all the time. People will get all up in the air over an issue that is not even a Bible issue. It is strictly a preference.
 - Have you ever heard this, "But we have always done it that way." It's tradition! Tradition was very important to the Pharisees (we've always washed our hands before we've eaten).
 - Likewise it is typically very important to people with a contentious spirit.
 - Tradition in and of itself is not wrong or wicked. Many traditions are pleasant and effective. We have traditions that we hold to as a family and they are great. Church families have traditions that are great.
4. But remember, traditions are preferences, not Bible. It is wrong when we hold to our preferences like they are cherished Bible truth, such as the blood atonement, or

- the deity of Christ, or salvation by grace through faith. When we hold to traditions and preferences this way, we can become very contentious and unhappy people.
5. We must learn to humble ourselves by laying aside our preferences. When we are able to do this without griping (and letting everybody know that we are unhappy), then we know we are on our way to maturing as Christians.
 6. But those that think that their preferences are Bible can't deal with change.
 - But guess what? If something is alive, it grows and changes. It is the law of life. Living things don't stay the same. The day you physically stop changing; you're dead!
 - The day you stop changing as a Christian, you are spiritually dead and will be relegated to the life of the Pharisee (just a contentious, self-consumed, miserable person).
 7. One of our mottos around here is "grow and change." What are you doing to grow and change? It may mean that you will have to leave your comfort zone and lay aside some preferences.
 8. What is our church doing to change and try to be more effective at reaching people? It may include laying aside some preferences or traditions that we like.
 - But remember, the church is not about our traditions, preferences, and little things that we love and cherish. It is about reaching people with the life-changing message of Christ.
 - I am not talking about compromising or becoming a ministry that utilizes fleshly appeal to try to reach people. I am talking about the willingness to lay aside our personal comfort and preferences, if it helps reach people.
 9. When Christ came to call Israel to repentance and to prepare them for their coming kingdom, Christ brought many changes.
 10. The Pharisees couldn't deal with the changes Jesus brought. Why? Because they clung to their preferences and traditions more than to Christ. What was the result? They were contentious and miserable people.

Second fact: Constantly finding fault with others is killing me.

1. Notice the phrase in verse 2, "...*they found fault.*" The Pharisees did this all the time. They were experts at finding fault in everybody else.
 - When Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, they found fault.
 - When Jesus healed a man and forgave him of his sins, they found fault.
 - When Jesus' disciples praised Him, they found fault.
 - When the prodigal son returned home and the father rejoiced, his brother (a type of the Pharisee), found fault.
 - When Jesus' disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath, they found fault.
 - When Jesus cast out devils, they found fault; and on, and on we could go.
2. Here is the sad part. They failed to realize that their critical, contentious spirits were killing **them**. **Matthew 15:12-14, 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26**
 - They were the blind leading the blind and both shall fall into the ditch.
3. Here is the problem when you are always finding fault in others. You typically have one huge blind spot - your own faults! By finding fault in others, it leads to an overinflated opinion of yourself, and is not based on reality.

4. You begin to think that you are better than others, which is exactly opposite of what God's Word teaches that you should be thinking. God's Word says that we should esteem others better than ourselves. **Philippians 2:3**
 - This isn't some kind of false humility. You can't fake it. You can't act as if it were true while all along you suspect that it is not.
5. But how do you do it? How do you make some scoundrel better than you?
 - You review your own sinful condition and then you become an expert at spotting your **own** sin, but not very good at seeing anyone else's.
 - Their sin is not your business. You can't see someone else's heart anyway. You don't know what is really going on.
 - You only know what is going on with you and where God is rooting out your latest compromise. You're too busy with your own sin to worry about anyone else's.
 - What is the result? Because you are so well acquainted with your own sin and not at all with the other guys, it is now quite natural to esteem others better than yourself.
 - Another way to do this is to see people not as they are, but as what they capable of being in Christ.
 - This gives us a means of appreciating someone even when it is hard to find something to appreciate.
 - See others as what they could be in Christ, while seeing yourself as what you would be without Him. On this basis, we will always see others as better than ourselves.
6. If you are going to overcome a contentious spirit, you must come to accept the fact that finding fault in others is killing you.

Third fact: Truth does not begin and end with me.

1. Let's read **John 7:44-49**. The Pharisees viewed themselves as the great guardians of truth. If the Pharisees had not believed on Christ, then He must not be for real. After all, the Pharisees couldn't be wrong!
2. Truth doesn't begin and end with me, so where does it begin and end? The Word of God. **John 17:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16-17**
3. We say this and know this, but the problem is living it.
4. Our critical and contentious spirits reveal an attitude that we think truth begins and ends with us. There are two ways to combat this:
 - First, admit that you are not always right.
 - It is a liberating day when you finally realize, "I don't have to always be right." It is okay to say, "I messed up. I made a mistake. I mishandled that. I misjudged that person. That was a dumb decision."
 - You know why some people are contentious and move from job to job, church to church, relationship to relationship, etc.? They can't admit they are wrong. They can't say they are sorry. **Example: John 8:1-9** (they just walked away and still couldn't bring themselves to say they were wrong and, "Let's help this lady.")

- Second, admit that you don't know it all.
 - There is no greater obstacle to truth and revelation than to think you already know what you need to know. But when you finally come to realize, "I don't know it all. I'm not omniscient" - now you are ready to listen and learn.
 - I don't know everything. I don't know that person's heart. I don't know his motives. I don't know the best way to do everything, etc.
 - But when you think you know it all, instead of listening and learning, you get mad and run. "I don't want to hear that. I already know that."
 - **Proverbs 9:8-9** - Many times this is the difference between being a success or a failure. It is the ability to admit when we are wrong, admit that we don't know it all, and to listen.

In Conclusion:

1. Do you struggle with a contentious spirit?
2. We have learned three facts from the Pharisees that you must accept if you are to overcome it.
 - My preferences are not the Bible.
 - Finding fault with others is killing me.
 - Truth does not begin and end with me.
3. You know what Pharisees do when they hear a message like this? They laugh it off and it is like water off a duck's back. They scoff or they say, "I sure hope so and so was here to hear this. He needs it!"
4. But those who truly love the Lord, and want to grow and change, take this message and make personal application to their hearts and lives and don't apply it to anybody but themselves.