**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

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**Errors of the Pharisees (Prejudice)**

For the past several weeks we have been studying some “errors of the Pharisees.” The Pharisees were a very strict religious sect among the Jews, but there were some terrible errors among them, and the Lord aimed some of His strongest denunciations at them. Whatever it was about them that merited such denunciation we want know what they are and we want to avoid them in our own lives. We have thus far considered their error of legalism, their error of traditionalism, and their hypocrisy. Today we want to consider a fourth error of the Pharisees, and that is their prejudice. The Pharisees were prejudice toward the truth.

Prejudice is one of the greatest enemies of the religion of Christ because it robs a man of truth.

What is prejudice? Webster defines prejudice as “(1) preconceived judgment or opinion (2) an opinion or learning adverse to anything without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge.” Someone has said “prejudice is being down on something you are not up on.” A prejudiced person is one who forms an opinion against something before he has all the facts.

The Pharisees were robbed of truth by their prejudice. There was no body of people who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah any more than the Pharisees had. The Messiah came, but because of prejudice they did not recognize Him. They rejected Him, and even played a major role in crucifying Him. What happened and how can we avoid the same thing happening in our own lives? This is the focus of our lesson today.

The Pharisees should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, because the evidence was abundant. Let us look at some of the evidence the Pharisees had access to.

 First, there were the fulfilled prophesies. Some have estimated there are over 300 prophesies in the Old Testament of the coming Messiah. Jesus fulfilled every one of them. The Pharisees had access to these prophesies. It was prophesied that He would be of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of David, born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, which is Bethlehem of Judea. Jesus had fulfilled these prophesies and many others. The Pharisees could have known this if they had gone to the trouble to find out. Jesus said to the Jews in John 5:39, *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”* Also in verse 46 He said to them, *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.”*

 Also the miracles that Jesus did were evidence that He was the Messiah. When John the Baptist was in prison he sent his disciples to Jesus and asked Him, *“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”* (Matt. 11:3). *“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’”* (vs. 4-6) These works of Jesus were proof that He was the One who was to come and they were not to look for another. And these miracles of Jesus were not done in a corner, but were performed in the presence of multitudes for open scrutiny. As Peter said in Acts 2:22, *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know”*  The Jews were fully aware that Jesus performed miracles. This should have been sufficient evidence to the Pharisees that Jesus was of God, and was whom He claimed to be.

There was an exception among them. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, *“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”* (John 3:2) The other Pharisees could have seen what Nicodemus saw.

 The point is, there was ample evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. But in spite of all the evidence, they did not recognize Him. Why? Prejudice had blinded their eyes.

Prejudice is characterized by five things: Closed-mindedness, Preconceived ideas, Pride, Rationalization and Dishonesty. All five of these were characteristic of the Pharisees.

First, prejudice is characterized by closed-mindedness. The Pharisees had closed their minds to the truth. In John 7:50-52 it says, *“Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?’ They answered and said to him, ‘Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.’”* The question that Nicodemus asked his fellow Pharisees was a reasonable question, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” No! But they had already judged Jesus and refused to investigate further. Since Jesus was from Galilee that was enough for them to reject Him, their minds were made up, and they closed their mind to any other consideration. It’s like the Judge who heard the case for the prosecution and then said, “I’m ready to give my verdict. I don’t need to hear any more.” The defense attorney objected and said, “Surely Judge, you are going to hear the case for the defense, aren’t you?” The Judge said, “No, my mind is made up. If I hear your side, it may confuse me.” A Judge who would do that would be thrown off the bench, and rightly so. Truth seekers do not close their mind to a full investigation of the truth. But the Pharisees were not truth seekers. They were prejudiced. They had already made up their mind what they wanted to believe and had closed their mind to any other consideration.

Secondly, prejudice is characterized by preconceived ideas. This is the colored glasses concept. Everything the prejudiced persons sees and hears is colored by his preconceived judgments and opinions. The Pharisees had formed their own ideas of what the Messiah would be like. Their concept, evidently, was that He would be an earthly king, a military giant, who would lead the Jews to overthrow the Roman oppression and restore the kingdom of Israel to heights that might even exceed that of David and Solomon’s reign. But Jesus came, born of humble parents, laid at birth in a manger, brought up in the despised town of Nazareth in Galilee. He surrounded Himself with common people, preached love and obedience to God, never made a move to be an earthly king, but went about preparing for a kingdom not of this world, finally was arrested, spat upon, scourged, and crucified. How could this be the Messiah? He just didn’t fit their preconceived notions. And so they rejected Him.

There are many people today who are convinced that what they have been taught by their parents, or by their preachers is right and cannot be wrong. They believe this, not because they have investigated the evidence, but just because that is what they have always believed. Rather than investigating to see what is truth, they close their minds to further investigation because it does not fit their preconceived opinions. If we do this we will be just as blind to the truth as the Pharisees.

Thirdly, prejudice is characterized by pride. People tried to reason with the Pharisees, but the Pharisees would take on an “who are you to teach us” attitude. For example, once they sent officers to take Jesus (John 7:32). Later the officers retuned without Jesus. The chief priests and Pharisees said to them, *“Why have you not brought Him?”* The officers answered, *“No man ever spoke like this man.”* The Pharisees said to them, *“Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."* (John 7:45-49) Notice their pride. In John chapter 9 we read of Jesus healing a man who had been born blind. The Pharisees questioned the man about how he was made to see. The man said to them, *“Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”* That is good reasoning, but the Pharisees said to him, *“‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’ And they cast him out.”* (John 9:32-34) Prejudiced people know their right because of who they are, not because of the evidence. That is pride.

Fourthly, prejudice is characterized by rationalization. When a person doesn’t want to believe the obvious, he can always come up with some explanation to justify his lack of belief. For example, in Matthew 12:22 we read of Jesus healing a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute. The multitudes who saw it were amazed and said, *“Could this be the Son of David?”* or “Could this be the Messiah?” When the Pharisees heard it they said, *“This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”* (v. 24) This was indeed a ridiculous explanation and Jesus points out the fallacy of it in verses 25-26. He said, *“If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”* In an effort to discredit Jesus, and justify their own rejection of Him, the Pharisees came up with this absurd conclusion that Jesus was casting out demons by Satan himself. They did not want to believe the truth about Jesus so they rationalized.

And then fifthly, prejudice is characterized by downright dishonesty. In John chapter 11 we read of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This was reported to the Pharisees. Verses 47-48 says, *“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’”* Notice, they admit Jesus did many signs, but they refused to see this as evidence that He was of God. Verse 53 says that *“they plotted to put Him to death.”* Regardless of the evidence they were going to kill Him. They absolutely refused to face the facts objectively. This is dishonesty.

The Pharisees were prejudiced toward the truth. They closed their minds to an honest investigation of truth. Their preconceived ideas blinded them to seeing the truth. Their pride caused them to refuse to listen to other who could help. To justify themselves in believing what they wanted to believe they rationalized by twisting and distorting the truth. Their refusal to face the facts objectively proved they were dishonest. Today we can be just like the Pharisees if we are not careful. Have you ever refused to do further study of the Bible on an issue because you didn’t want it to be proven that you were wrong, and that you needed to change? Have you ever refused to change your beliefs because of your own personal preferences? Jesus said in Matthew13:14-15, *“And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'”* Notice the picture of prejudice: hearts have grown dull, ears are hard of hearing, eyes they have closed. The result? They will not understand and turn so that God should heal them. They are lost. But Jesus said of His disciples in verse 16, *“But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.”* The Pharisees and other Jewish leaders with all their education could not see the truth because of their prejudice, while the apostles and uneducated common people could see it because they opened their hearts to it. Let us open our hearts to the truth and accept it whatever it may say.

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