

## "Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"-1King 22:16

### The Compassion Of The Pharisees

Compassion is one of the greatest characteristics of the human spirit. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "compassion" as a "deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it."

Our Lord was moved by compassion on many occasions. Matthew tells us that, prior to the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus went out and saw a great multitude and "was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick" ([Matt. 14:14](#)).

Upon seeing a poor leper Jesus was "moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed'" ([Mark 1:41](#)). His compassion was also shown to the widow of Nain who had lost her son ([Luke 7:13](#)), and to the two blind men near Jericho ([Matt. 20:34](#)).

His compassion also moved Him to teach the multitudes ([Mark 6:34](#)). At this very moment He is our compassionate High Priest in heaven ([Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16](#)).

Following His example, Christians are commanded to be compassionate individuals. We are to have compassion for one another ([1 Pet. 3:8](#)), and for the lost ([Jude 1:22-23](#)).

As you study the New Testament, there is one group of people who appear to be totally lacking in this great moral quality, i.e., the Pharisees. In this article, I would like to examine a few examples of their ungodly attitude.

### The Pharisee And The Tax Collector

In [Luke 18:9-14](#) our Lord gives us the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee did not really go to the temple to pray to God -- he prayed to himself. The Pharisee was really trying to tell the Lord how lucky he was to have him in His corner.

Jewish law prescribed only one obligatory fast, and that was on the annual Day of Atonement. Jews who wished to gain special merit fasted also on Mondays and Thursdays. It is noteworthy that these were the market days when Jerusalem was full of country people. Those who fasted whitened their faces and appeared in unkempt clothes, and those days gave their piety a large audience.

The Levites were to receive a tithe of all a man's produce ([Num. 18:21](#)). Nevertheless, this Pharisee tithed everything, even things with which there was no obligation to tithe. Our Lord pronounced woe upon those who paid "tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" ([Matt. 23:23](#)).

No doubt all that the Pharisee said was true -- he did fast twice a week; he did meticulously give tithes; he was not as other men are; still less was he like that tax-collector. However, the question is not, "Am I as good as my fellowman?" The question is "Am I as good as Christ?" And when we set our lives beside the life of Jesus and beside the holiness of God, all that is left to say is, "God be merciful to me -- the sinner."

### The Woman Caught In Adultery

The Pharisees were out to get some charge on which they could discredit Jesus, and in [John 8:1-11](#) they thought they had impaled Him on the horns of a dilemma. The event begins as the Pharisees brought a

woman who had been caught in the act of adultery and set her before our Lord. When a difficult legal question arose, the natural and routine thing was to take it to a Rabbi for a decision -- so the scribes and Pharisees approached Jesus as a Rabbi with a woman taken in **adultery**.

Adultery was **a crime punishable by death (Lev. 20:10)**. If Jesus said the woman ought to be stoned to death, they would have accused Him of lacking compassion for a sinner, and never again would He be called the "friend of sinners" (cf. **Luke 15:2**). If He said the woman should be pardoned, it would immediately be said that He was teaching men to break the Law of Moses. As the Pharisees insisted that Jesus respond to their questions, Jesus stooped down and wrote with His finger on the ground. The scribes and Pharisees continued to insist on an answer -- they got it. Jesus said in effect: "All right! Stone her! But let the man that is without sin be the first to cast a stone." There was a silence as slowly the accusers drifted away. Therefore, Jesus and the woman were left alone.

There are still those who think Christianity gives them the right to judge the heart and motives of others and condemn them. They think Christ has given them the role of a moral watchdog, one trained to tear the sinner into pieces.

Our first emotion towards one who has made a mistake should be pity. We must always extend to others the same compassionate pity we would wish to be extended to ourselves if we were involved in a like situation (**Gal. 6:1**).

It is easy for men today to draw the wrong lesson from this story and leave others with the impression that Jesus forgave lightly and easily, as if her sin did not matter. Jesus exhibited genuine pity. The basic difference between Jesus and the scribes

and Pharisees was that they wished to condemn; He wished to forgive.

It seems to me that the Pharisees wished to stone this woman to death and were going to take great pleasure in doing so. They knew the thrill of exercising the power to condemn; Jesus knew the thrill of exercising the power to forgive. Jesus looked upon this sinner with a pity born of love; the scribes and Pharisees regarded her with disgust born of self-righteousness.

Jesus ends this event by challenging this woman to lead a sinless life. Here was no easy forgiveness; here was a challenge that pointed a sinner to heights of goodness of which she had never dreamed.

### **The Sinful Woman**

In **Luke 7:36-48** we find our Lord in the courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. The houses of wealthy people were built round an open courtyard, and in the courtyard there would be a garden and a fountain. When a Rabbi was at a meal in such a house, all kinds of people came in to listen to the words of wisdom that fell from his lips.

According to custom, when a guest entered such a house the host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That was a mark of respect that was never omitted in the case of a distinguished Rabbi. This helps us to understand why Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (**Matt. 26:48-49**).

Cool water was also poured over the guest's feet to cleanse and comfort them, and either a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of rose oil was placed on the guest's head. These things good manners demanded, and in this case, not one of them was done.

In the east the guests did not sit at a table -- they lay on low couches, resting on the left elbow, leaving the right arm free, with the feet stretched out behind; and during the

meal the sandals were taken off -- this explains how the woman was standing beside Jesus' feet.

The woman in this case was a notoriously bad woman. Around her neck she wore, like all Jewish women, a little vial of concentrated perfume; they were called alabasters. She wished to pour it on His feet, for it was all she had to offer -- but as she saw Him the tears came and fell upon His feet. Luke tells us that she "stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil" ([Luke 8:38](#)).

Simon was conscious of no need, therefore felt no love, and so received no forgiveness. Simon looked at himself as a good man in the sight of men and of God. The woman was conscious of nothing else than a pressing need, and therefore was overwhelmed with love for Him who could supply it, and so received forgiveness.

The one thing that shuts a man off from God is self-sufficiency. The strange thing is that the better a man is the more he feels his sin -- this is why Paul thought of himself as "the chief of sinners" ([1 Tim. 1:15](#)).

## **Are You More Like Jesus Or The Pharisees?**

Are you compassionate towards the lost? Do you see those lost in sin as individuals who have been blinded by "the god of this age" ([2 Cor. 4:3](#))?

Do you mourn over their sins and try to teach them? Paul said his "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" ([Rom. 10:1-3](#)). Do you have compassion towards your brethren when they sin? Does your compassion move you to warn them? Paul told the Ephesian elders that "for three years I did not cease

to warn everyone night and day with tears" ([Acts 20:31](#)).

Do you mourn when a brother or sister leaves the Lord? How do you treat those who fall away and then come back to God? Do we allow them to be swallowed up with sorrow ([2 Cor. 2:1-7](#))? Do we "reaffirm" our love towards them as we are commanded ([2 Cor. 2:8](#))?

Sometimes Christians allow the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh or the pride of life to drive them away from God (cf. [1 John 2:16](#)). And like the prodigal son, they sink in the mire of sin -- they are stained with the shame and guilt that sin brings (cf. [Luke 15:11-24](#)). And sometimes, like the prodigal son, they "come to themselves" and realize what a mess they have made of their lives and they determine to come back to their Heavenly Father. How you treat those who come back to God speaks volumes about your compassion -- it reveals you to be a follower of Jesus Christ or a modern day Pharisee.

I am convinced that there are Christians who rejoice when other people fall into sin. Sometimes as people are trying to rebuild a life that has been wrecked and ravaged by sin, other Christians do their best to discourage and destroy them!

Sometimes a person comes forward to make a public confession of sin and some busybody wants to know all of the details. Sometimes people repent, and then other Christians have to tell everyone they meet what the person did wrong -- although they would never dream of divulging their little family secrets. Apparently, some people think that there is a cooler spot in hell reserved for the gossip than there is for the adulterer!

- David Padfield