



God's Pathway to Righteousness

Adapted from "Who are You Spiritually?" series by Sam Rijfkogel

Would anyone consider you a *Pharisee*? This word puts a lot of different definitions in one's mind. John Ortberg provides a modern understanding to this word in the August 23, 2003, edition of *The Christian Century*. Ortberg talks about how each of us has a bit of Pharisee in him or her.

James Dunn notes that in the first century, a disproportionate amount of *rabbinic* [Jewish teachings] attention was devoted to three areas of the law: dietary rules, Sabbath-keeping, and circumcision.

This was in spite of the fact that rabbis would not have claimed these as the central aspects of God's will for humanity. They knew that the essence of the

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law was the *shema*—the loving of God with [all of one’s] heart and soul and strength. So why the relentless focus on dietary laws, circumcision and Sabbath-keeping?

“The answer,” Dunn says, “involves ‘identity markers,’ or boundaries. All groups of human beings have a tendency to be exclusive; they want to know who is inside and who is out. So, they adopt identity markers—visible practices of dress, vocabulary or behavior that serve to distinguish who is inside the group from who is outside.

“For instance, if you were driving along in the ’60s and saw a Volkswagen van plastered with ‘Make Love Not War’ bumper stickers, with a long-haired, tie-dyed, granny-glasses wearing driver, you’d know you were observing a hippie. If it were the ’80s and you saw a BMW driver wearing Gucci shoes and a Rolex watch, you’d know you were observing a yuppie. Every fraternity or sorority has its own uniform.”

“With this in mind, the attention given to the purity codes in the first century becomes clearer...Jesus is

not accusing the Pharisees of an early form of...trying to earn their justification by strenuous moral effort. He does not regard these laws as bizarre or outlandish.

“Perhaps most important, He does not reject His own religious culture. He agrees with the Pharisees that God’s work in human history is happening precisely through the life and destiny of this people of Israel.

“But now,” Dunn continues, “the kingdom is breaking into human history in a new and unexpected way...The identity markers that will proclaim the authenticity of the people of God will be a circumcised heart and a diet of justice and love.

“Then people will not simply try to do right things; they will be the kind of persons who want to do right things; they will be clean ‘inside.’ Jesus saw this not as the repudiation of Israel’s ancient dream, but as its ultimate fulfillment...”¹

The struggle of **Mark 7** is a struggle inside every

¹ John Ortberg, “Pharisees are us: Mark 7:1-8, 21-23,” *The Christian Century*, August 23, 2003, www.christiancentury.org/article/20003-08/pharisees-are-us (accessed April 19, 2017).

human being who seeks to take faith seriously. There is a self-righteousness in me that does not want to die.

There is something inside me that is not bothered when others are excluded, that wants others to be excluded—that feels more special when I'm on the inside and somebody else is not.

Henri Nouwen wrote that it is very hard to stop being the prodigal son without turning into the elder brother.

IMPORTANT: Any time people are not experiencing authentic transformation—as in **Mark 7:21-23 (ESV)**—they will inevitably be drawn toward some kind of faith characterized by boundary markers.

We will look for substitute ways of distinguishing ourselves from those on the outside. The boundary markers change from century to century, but they all reinforce a false sense of superiority, fed by the intent to exclude others.


“COURAGE” Level Questions

C1: Does your behavior not line up with your desired intentions?

C2: Have you ever tried to gain or build your identity through self-righteous behavior like position, power, money, or family?

C3: Have you ever tried to achieve success through self-righteous behavior only to discover once you have reached your goal you still feel unsuccessful?

C4: Just as a baby is born complete, he or she is still immature and needs to develop. So, when we are born again, we are immature and need to develop. What areas in your life do you need to mature and develop in?



C5: Do you find yourself trying to obtain success with God in the same way you discover success on the job?

C6: Do you identify more with the prodigal son or the elder brother? What is your plan to move towards wholeness?

“STRENGTH” Level Questions

Read the following verse and answer the questions.

Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

S1: What does the word “conformed” mean to you?

S2: What does the word “transformed” mean to you?

S3: To what in your life have you conformed that needs to be transformed?

Read the following verse and answer the questions.

Romans 5:17 (ESV)

S4: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “righteousness?”

S5: What is the opposite of “righteousness?”

S6: What do the following verses mean to you regarding righteousness?

- **Philippians 3:9 (ESV)**


- **John 10:10 (ESV)**

“ENDURANCE” Level Questions

E1: When you hear the term “savior identity” what does that mean to you?

E2: The word soul in the Greek is *psuche*, which is the mind, will, and emotions of our life. God intended your soul to be shaped by what the Spirit and the Word of God speaks to us. Think about your soul. Are you led by the Spirit and Word of God or something else? Why?

E3: How can you either continue to be led by God’s Spirit and Word or eliminate the outside influences to your soul?



Two of the Greek words for life used in the Bible are *zoe* and *bios*. One is the God kind of life and the other is a biological type of life. Reflect on these two words and then answer the following questions:

E4: What does the “God kind of life” mean to you?

E5: What does the “biological life” mean to you?

E6: Which life would you prefer?

E7: What things are keeping you from living this type of life? Take a moment to pray about these things.