

CHAPTER 5

*Yet the joyous good news about the only true and living God...
Once you admit Him into your life in an open, honest, and hearty welcome,
you will be astounded with delight!*

*For you will find that this One who was so distant, so dreaded,
does indeed become your loving, caring Father.*

*You will be overwhelmed with the generosity, goodness, and compassion
of the living Christ who comes to you as a Friend...
able to deliver you from your despair.*

*You will be amazed at the precious presence of God's Holy Spirit,
who becomes your guide and guardian on life's tangled trails.
W. Phillips Keller*

JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS PHONIES

DO BE, DO BE, DO! This could be the chorus of a Frank Sinatra song. But for us, it's a summary of the interaction between Jesus and the hypocritical religious leaders, as told in the Book of Matthew. The Bible records that the religious leaders did everything to be seen by men. They did good, so they looked good. They are the DO's in the chorus. Jesus was, and still is, more concerned about the BE. What will we BE? What are we on the inside? The religious leaders were about DOing. Jesus came and told them to BElieve in Him. But the religious leaders kept DOing. Jesus told them again to BElieve. But after many DO BE-DO BE-DO interactions, the religious leaders chose to DO. Jesus then told them, the Kingdom of God was to be taken away from them.

The Book of Matthew records many confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees—the religious leaders. The Pharisees CHOSE to reject what Christ offered. They hardened their hearts toward Him. Jesus loved them and wanted to spend eternity with them. He wanted to bless them, but they would have nothing to do with Him.

Matthew Henry says this about the hypocritical religious teachers: "Christ was willing to save them, but they were not willing to be saved by Him. There is nothing between sinners and eternal happiness but their proud and unbelieving unwillingness." [The Matthew Henry Commentary, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing]

Jesus is the perfect gentleman. He won't force Himself on anyone. As William Barclay says, "Jesus stands with outstretched hands of appeal, an appeal which men have the awful responsibility of being able to accept or to

refuse.” [The Daily Bible Study Series, Revised Edition, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1976]

Matthew 23 relates an incredible confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. During this stinging public rebuke, Jesus calls them hypocrites. A hypocrite is defined as “a pretender, one who acts a part; one who wears a mask to cover his true feelings.” He puts on an external show. Jesus also calls them vipers and white-washed tombstones. The viper is a poisonous snake—meaning, the words the religious leaders spoke were deadly. “Tombstones”—meaning, they looked good on the outside but were full of death. Jesus told them they were not sons of God but sons of the devil. He called them liars.

Jesus told the people that the religious leaders put burdens on others. Their religion consisted of working and striving for God’s blessings and man’s admiration. They chose rules for others to follow. Jesus said that wasn’t right! He came to take away this burden. We are to rest in Christ. When we believe that Christ’s death on the cross cleanses our sins and puts us in a right relation with God, then the Holy Spirit empowers us. Jesus came to set us free from burdens. We are free to love, free to obey, free to BE what He created us to BE.

The religious leaders were proud of themselves and of all they knew about God. They were proud of the good things they did. They were proud that others looked up to them. They had made an idol of themselves. Jesus said they were wrong!

The Pharisees manipulated others and twisted the words of the Bible to get people to give money. Jesus said this was wrong.

Jesus told them they were blind hypocrites. They were blind because they refused to see what Christ was showing them. They wanted to DO it their way. Jesus said they were wrong.

The main thing wrong with religious phonies is they don’t make the main thing “the main thing.” Jesus requires the main thing BE Him and our relationship with Him. The main thing is not memorizing thousands of rules and making our lives a religious ritual—the main thing is BEing God’s kid. God wants us to enjoy Him. He wants us to enjoy the lives He’s given us. Keeping rules and making a show is never the main thing. He gave us the rules so we would know what’s best for us. The rules keep us out of trouble. The rules guide us into the best and happiest life.

God’s wrath comes upon religious phonies because they deny what the blood of Christ has done for them. When Christ chose to die on the cross and shed His blood for us, He offered us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God gave His Son so that we might have life, even eternal life. We must accept this most awesome gift.

We’re nothing more than religious phonies if we do “religious things” just so people will admire us. We’re phonies, too, if we do good just to look good to others. We can’t make the main thing in our lives the DO’S. By BEing forgiven of our sins through the cleansing of Christ’s blood, by BEing given new life by the shed blood of Christ, by BELieving in Jesus Christ, we BEcome a child of the King.