

Question: Leon: I've been reading the Gospel of Mark lately and something that stood out this time that I don't think I had thought that much about before, was how kind, caring, and considerate Jesus was to people in trouble while so hard on the religious leaders like the Pharisees and Sadducees. Why do you think he became so frustrated with them?

Answer: That is a great question. Jesus definitely showed us how to be compassionate toward others who were going through all kinds of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual problems. In doing so, he showed us what we should be like as Christians. But he saw through the kind of religion that so often prevails, that makes us arrogant, judgmental, and self-righteous.

Remember that John the Baptist had the same attitude as people came out to him to hear him preach and to be baptized by him. He called the religious leaders a generation of vipers and asked them "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" It intrigues me that the New Testament doesn't say much about being religious. James of all the New Testament writers is the one who declared that one who seemed to be religious but didn't bridle their tongue had a useless religion and that pure and undefiled religion was to visit the orphans and widows and keep oneself unspotted from the world.

If we want to follow Jesus in life as He challenged us to do, we must not allow our faith or study of God's word to make us self-righteous, proud, or a judge of others. When we lay our lives down beside Jesus, it should always lead to a recognition of our failures, our lack, and our desperate need for forgiveness and grace. Those religious

leaders had reached an attitude that made them feel they deserved God's blessings in life. Jesus knew they deserved only the torments of hell, as do the rest of us. Since all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), there is no salvation outside God's overwhelming grace. That is the reason it is so important for those of us who strive to follow Christ to do all we can to spread the message of good news or gospel to everyone we can.

No one is hopeless, if they can see both the depth of their sin and the amazing grace and power of our God. Through the blood of Jesus every sin can be forgiven. So, our challenge is to see the world through Jesus' eyes. So, we can see a foreign woman who had been married five times and was not living with a man she hadn't married as a great prospect for God. We can offer forgiveness to one caught in adultery that others want to condemn. We can offer a tax collector, that was hated by his own people as place as an apostle of Christ. We can be so forgiving that even when a leader among us, like Peter, messes up and denies the Lord three times in a row, we still offer him forgiveness and a fresh start. Doesn't it just amaze you that Jesus would not only forgive Peter but put him right back into the leadership role among the apostles and having him up preaching the gospel on Pentecost, less than two months after his fall? I want to have a heart like Jesus, don't you?