

Teaching The Truth

The Pharisees and Sadducees were the major ruling parties at the time Jesus walked this earth. Josephus says that the Pharisees came into existence as a religious group sometime around 160 BC. The Sadducees appeared sometime after the Maccabean revolt which occurred approximately 165–160 BC. The name Pharisee means “Separated Ones,” and the term Sadducee means “Righteous Ones,” “Zadokites,” or “judges.” The Pharisees believed in the entire Old Testament, the Prophets and the Writings. They considered scripture to be authoritative and applied the scriptures to everyday situations. They developed the oral law which they considered to be as important as the written scriptures or the Word of God. They believed in angels, demons, obedience to the law, resurrection, punishment after death except for the holiest who would experience some type of purgatory. They were missionary minded. They were highly respected and honored by the Jewish people. They controlled the synagogues and consequently the mass of people.

The Sadducees were the conservatives of their day. Yet, they rejected much of the Old Testament or the scriptures and believed only the first five books of the Bible were authoritative. They opposed the Oral Law of the Pharisees. They rejected the idea of life after death and did not believe in angels, demons, punishment after death or that God really cared about people. They held to a literal interpretation of the Torah. That was good. They had control of the Temple and its ministry. The Sadducees had great political power. They were the aristocrats of the Jewish society.

THE SETTING. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees slaughtered the meaning of the scriptures. The Pharisees added the Oral Law to the scriptures and the Sadducees rejected the vast majority of the scriptures. Some would even add up the numerical value of various Hebrew letters, words, and phrases and compare them in order to discover hidden meanings in the scriptures. The Pharisees used allegory to understand the scriptures. Then came Jesus.

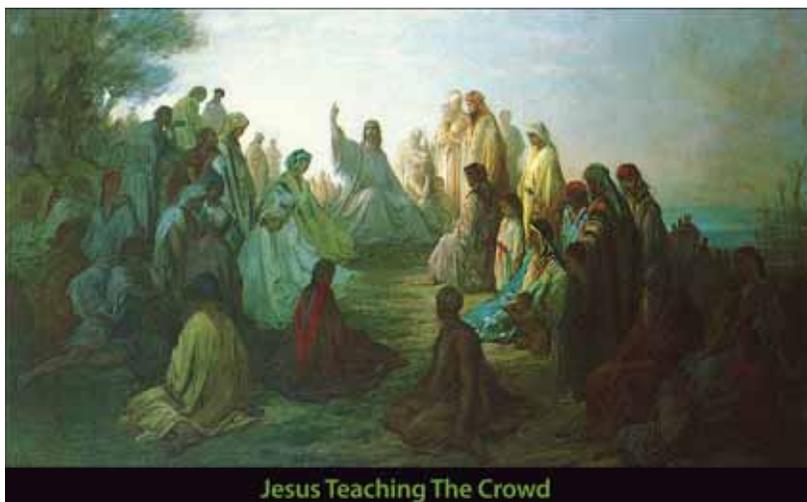
At the start of Jesus’ ministry, the people thought that He was teaching something new and different. The gospel of Mark records this event for us.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—

and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.” (NASB) Mark 1:27

The people were amazed at His teaching.

... for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (NASB) Matt. 7:29

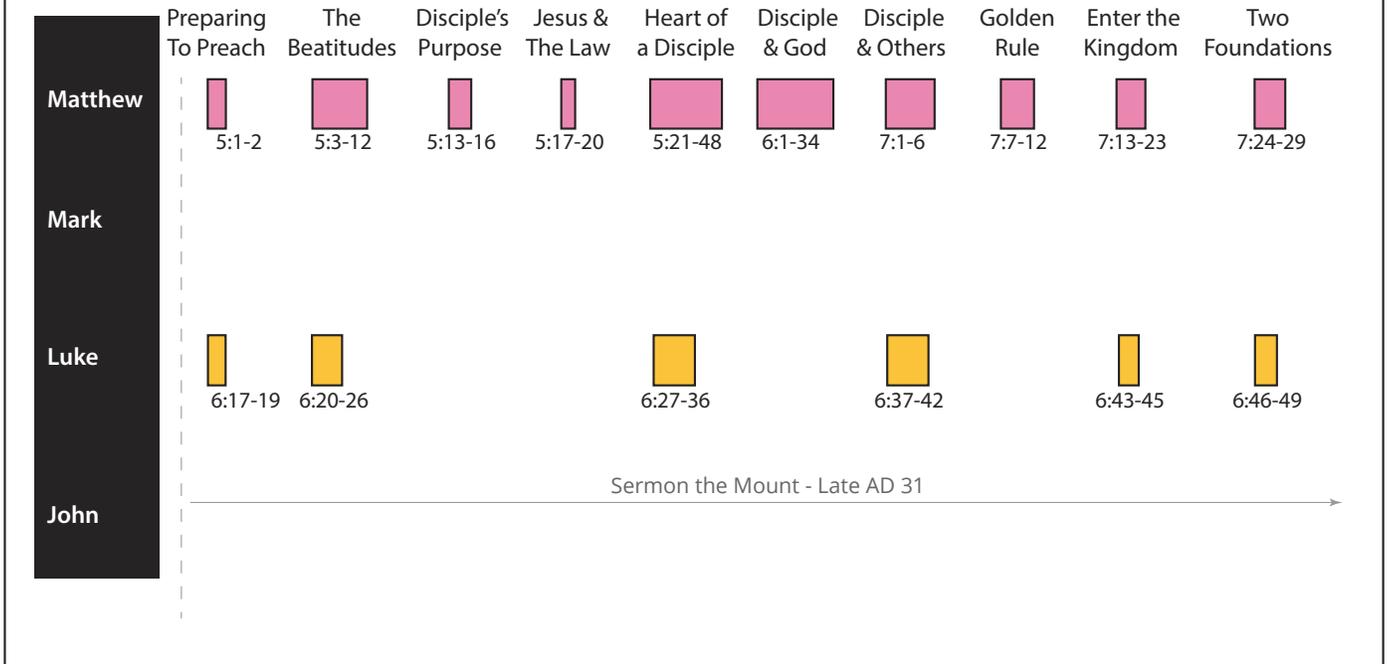


The people also heard Jesus rebuke the Pharisees and Sadducees about their rules regarding the Sabbath. Jesus even ignored some of their rules about not working on the Sabbath.

In the future studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will

Life and Heart of Jesus

Sermon on the Mount



tell the people that “you have heard, but I say . . .” Jesus will repeatedly disagree with the Pharisees and Sadducees. He will do this in Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, and 33-34. Jesus will eventually warn His disciples to beware of the teaching of these religious leaders (Matt. 16:11-12) and eventually Jesus silenced His critics using scripture (Matt. 22:34, 46). In Matthew 23, Jesus repeatedly warned the scribes and Pharisees with, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees . . .”

Colossians 2:20-23 probably summarizes the conflict with the Pharisees, scribes, and the Sadducees very well.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) - in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (NASB) Col. 2:20-23

NOT WHAT YOU THINK. The beatitudes were revolutionary because Jesus emphasized not the external conduct as did the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees, but the internal heart attitude. So after Jesus concluded the beatitudes and before He started the next series of statements where He declared “You have heard, but I say,” He made this comment,

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. (NASB) Matt. 5:17

The Greek word that Jesus uses for “fulfill” comes from the root word PLEEROO. It has a range of meanings and can have the sense of “completing, carrying out work, fulfilling a wish, satisfying a desire, meeting an obligation, bringing to full measure, filling a gap, and enlarging.” Therefore, Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets but to complete them or “bring to full measure.” This is important to remember. He did not come to change anything.

The Law and Prophets were major sections of the Jewish scriptures or Tanakh which Protestants call the Old Testa-

ment. The Tanakh is divided into three sections: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings.” Jesus was claiming that He had come to complete the Old Testament, or bring it to full measure and He did in two major ways.

First, Jesus corrected the teachings of the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees. So the people thought that He was teaching them something new. The people were amazed.

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (NASB) Matt. 7:28-29

The religious leaders had corrupted the very book that they claimed to know. Later in Matthew, we will hear Jesus tell the Sadducees that they do not know or understand the Tanakh (Matt. 22:29). Yes they

had memorized it, but they did not understand it. Jesus corrected their errors.

Today there are many religious leaders just like the Pharisees and Sadducees who claim to know the Bible. They write scholarly books about the Bible, but they do not have the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives to help them understand it. They are just like the highly educated Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees who had major portions of the Tanakh memorized. How many scholars today have it memorized? Yet, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day did not understand the scriptures, and some religious scholars today do

not either because they have never really believed in God and submitted themselves in [faith to Him](#).

Jesus fulfilled the Law in another way. He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament or the scriptures. Jesus told the twelve Apostles that The Law and The Prophets had predicted the events that would occur up to the time of John the Baptist,

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. (NASB) Matt. 11:12-13

John was the forerunner of Jesus. And later Jesus includes Himself in the prophecies.

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all

things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures . . . (NASB) Luke 24:44-45

Jesus literally satisfied the prophecies about the The Law and The Prophets and brought to full measure its teachings.

TRUTH IS NOT RELATIVE. Today, some religious leaders are claiming that the Bible changes meaning with time. For example, one author claims that 1 Timothy 2:12 has two different meanings. He claims that one meaning applies to the early church, but there is a different meaning for us

The Jewish Scriptures (Tanakh)

| The Law | The Prophets | The Writings |
|--|---|---|
| Torah (Pentateuch) Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy | Former Prophets Joshua Judges Samuel (1 & 2) Kings (1 & 2) Latter Prophets Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve (Minor Prophets) | Poetry Psalms Proverbs Job Five Rolls Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Esther Ecclesiastes Historical Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah Chronicles (1 & 2) |

today. Did those who were listening to Jesus think that the meaning of the scriptures changed with time?

Is it possible that some listeners thought that the meaning of scripture was unknown and Jesus was simply giving His view? Frequently, people ask me, “What is your view?” Our goal is not to give a view, but to teach what God is saying.

Truth is not relative. It is unchanging. That is Jesus’ point in His next statement.

For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (NASB) Matt. 5:18

Jesus’ point is that nothing in the Word of God will disappear or change until all has been completed while heaven and earth exist. Not even the smallest letter or stroke will change. The Greek word that Jesus uses for the smallest letter is related to the Hebrew letter “YOD” and the stroke refers to an extension on the Hebrew letter BETH. YOD is

like a large English comma and the stroke is like a serif on a letter. Now those are small. Jesus did not say that a book of the scriptures, chapter, paragraph, verse, or word would not disappear. He said not even a stroke would disappear until all is completed.

AVOIDING CONFUSION. Then why did the ceremonial law with the sacrifices, bulls, goat, lambs, altars, priests, temple, feasts, and rituals disappear? Why are we not practicing them today? The answer is found in Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15-28, and 10:1-18.

The [first passage, Heb. 8:6-13](#), tells us that when Jesus came He made the old covenantal system of animals, priests, and blood obsolete. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted

that the Messiah would bring a new covenant which would replace that old covenant (Jer. 31:31), and Jesus did.

The [second passage, Heb. 9:15-28](#), tells us that Jesus was the One who brought the new covenant. When Jesus died, that old covenant disappeared.

The [third passage, Heb. 10:1-18](#), tells us that the old sacrificial system was a shadow of better things to come. In other words, it was temporary.

In summary, these passages tell us that after Jesus died, the old sacrificial system was abolished according to the scriptures. That is, the scriptures were fulfilled.

THE WARNING. Then Jesus spoke these words,

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the

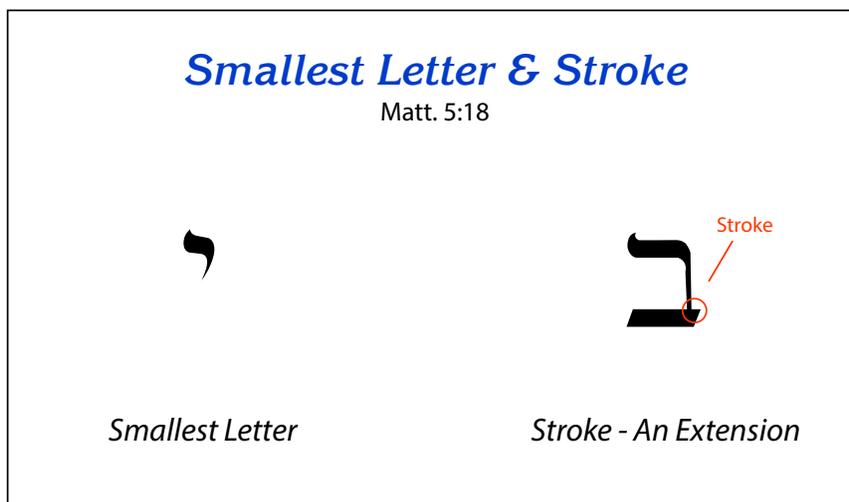
kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NASB) Matt. 5:19

Jesus makes a negative statement and a positive one. The negative statement is about those who

“annul” any statement in the Word of God. The Greek word that Jesus used for “annuls” actually means to “destroy.” Anyone who destroys a statement in the Word of God will be the very least person in the Kingdom of Heaven. He or she will be nothing compared to everybody else.

This was a warning to the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees. Jesus had already declared that He was not changing the meaning of scripture, and scripture itself had not changed. So that means the religious leaders had changed the meaning of The Law and The Prophets. They were in trouble.

How did the crowd sitting on the sides of the hill feel at this point? They had listened to their religious leaders and accepted what they said. They had willingly accepted and



believed what they had been told. Now they were amazed and surprised at Jesus' teaching.

It is amazing how people will believe almost anything. That was true in Jesus' time, and it is still true today. For example, consider those who have joined cults and followed individuals who claim to be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We can find some individuals who claim to be Jesus on the internet. Some people believed Jim Jones, the leader of the cult called the Peoples' Temple, and later died after drinking poisoned Kool-Aid in the 1970s. There are folks who believe that some day they will become a god and rule their own planet.

Some follow the leaders of the Jesus Seminar which teach that all but eight verses in the New Testament should be removed because one day a group of them voted 7,981 verses out of the New Testament. Currently, there is a new teaching called "[The New Perspective on Paul](#)" which teaches that the religious leaders of Jesus' day believed what Jesus believed and taught. But it is obvious from the gospels that they were in conflict. There is also a new ministry called the "Theophostic Ministry" which believes that when men and women become Christians, they become sinless. There are those who teach that after Jesus died on the cross, He entered hell and was tortured by the demons. They also teach that God lost ownership of this world to Satan when Adam sinned, and though Abraham made a mistake by making a covenant with God, God was able to get His property back when Jesus died on the cross. They claim that God was smarter than Satan.

During a convention a well-known television evangelist claimed that he had received a revelation from the Holy Spirit that there were nine gods. He claimed that his teaching was not like anything anyone would hear from the "old main line denominations" and asked his audience if they wanted to hear this new revelation. Then he told the crowd that there were nine gods. God the Father had a soul, body, and spirit. God the Son had a soul, body, and spirit, and God the Holy Spirit had a soul, body, and spirit. That makes nine!

Incredible? Yes! Men and women will believe and follow almost anyone, just as the people in Jesus' day followed the

Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees. People will believe almost anything, including that there is no god.

[The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God,"](#)

[They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice;](#)

[There is no one who does good. \(NASB\) Ps. 53:1](#)

POST-MODERN MOVEMENT. On the opposite side there are many who say that we cannot know truth. Why should we believe anything? This is what post-modernism is all about. The concept of truth is fleeting, and some would say that even Jesus was wrong and claim that we cannot know truth. But to claim that no one can know truth is a statement of "truth." Whoever makes the claim that no one can know truth has just made a statement that supposedly cannot be known.

Does one plus one now equal sixteen? Does gravity exist? Do bullets kill? Is it wrong to murder and commit rape? We can be assured that most post-modern thinkers would probably believe that murder and rape are wrong. That is a statement of truth. There are some other things that I can depend upon too. I can eat. I can sleep. I can read. I can do many other things. I believe that I can drive an automobile and it almost functions the same way each day.

Can we conclude that truth can be known? However we answer the question, the difficult issue of truth concerns the belief in God. Recently, Franklin Graham appeared on a national television program and when asked about Jesus Christ, he replied that Jesus was the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

[Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." \(John 14:6\).](#)

He quoted the above verse and concluded that Jesus was the only way to God. In response, the television anchor said, "That is narrow!" The post-modern would agree.

The post-modern does not believe that anyone can know truth. A recent popular movie titled, "The Matrix" is all about truth. A group of people are trapped inside a computer and they are attempting to discover what the world - life - is

all about. What is the truth? The movie is not a surprise. The response to Franklin Graham and to other followers of Jesus who declare that Jesus is the Truth is a surprise. Postmodernism is here in full swing. This is obvious from our television, our newspapers and magazines, our culture, people on the streets, and increasingly in our churches. Truth is being assaulted everywhere.

INFLUENCE IN THE CHURCH. As a result, some leaders in the church are encouraging us to be slow to declare to the world that Jesus is the only way. They say that when we claim to know truth, we will offend the listener. The Apostle Paul warned us that preaching about Jesus would appear to be foolishness to others even in his day (1 Cor. 1:18). We are told to change our Sunday morning worship services and modify other ministries in order to reach the post-modern. We must emphasize relationships and minimize any claims that we know truth. We should only introduce our claims of

truth after relationships are established.

The voices of change are

encouraging us to introduce the arts, dance, and music in our worship while down playing the teaching of truth. We are encouraged to share more personal stories, emphasize relationships, and avoid negative topics during the church services. The voices say that the post-modern needs to hear positive stories about what Jesus did in your life. We need to develop relationships with them, first and only after time they might believe in Jesus. In the beginning, they do not want to hear that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and only through Him can we come to the Father.

So the mature follower of Jesus must sit and sip on baby's milk because the church service has been turned into a post-modern seeker service. We are avoiding the teaching of truth. As a result, the follower of Jesus who is only taught on Sunday morning is on a diet of milk and is at risk of remaining a spiritual baby in Jesus (Heb. 5:11-14). The command to "Go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19) has become "Come

to us and we will make disciples."

The truth is that Jesus came to fulfill the scriptures. Now the teachings of Jesus are being minimized in an effort to evangelize the lost within the four walls of the church. Some pastors are neglecting the truth in an attempt to win some post-moderns and are not training the saints to go outside to those who do not know that they are spiritually dead.

The post-modern movement is moving into the church. There may be nothing wrong with the changes in the arts, music, or style. But when truth is minimized or even avoided in order to draw a crowd a great error has occurred. Where do the saints go to be taught the entire Word of God?

CONCLUSION. Just as the followers of the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees willingly accepted their teachings, many today are following a wide variety of false teachings while minimizing the very thing Jesus claimed He was doing - teaching the truth.

*I*ncredible? Yes! Men and women will believe and follow almost anyone, just as the people in the Jesus' day followed the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees.

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listeners by teaching the truth and correcting the leaders. The religious leaders had destroyed the truth by changing its meaning and avoiding parts of the scriptures. So Jesus warned them.

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (NASB) Matt. 5:19

Jesus encouraged them to teach the scriptures and keep them. Whoever teaches the scriptures and keeps them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.