

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
OCTOBER 11 2025

what belongs to God

Scripture Story: Matthew 22:15-46; 23; Mark 12:13-44; Luke 20:20-47; 21:1-4.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 66, 67.
Key Text: Matthew 22:37-40.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

When Jesus faced the powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, they were doing their best to trap Him to have Him put to death. However, Jesus was not only battling a war of ideas; He was fighting a spiritual war as well. His debates, meant to discredit Him, were instead written down for us to read 2,000 years later. God inspired the Bible writers to record these public debates in four separate accounts because there is something there for us today.

Jesus' main accusation against the Pharisees was that of hypocrisy. These wealthy, religiously and socially elite men were looked up to by the common people. They were seen as both an example for godly living and a guide for all their questions. However, these religious leaders were the furthest from "good examples" that they could possibly be! They said one thing and did another. Jesus took that seriously.

Another important point that Jesus makes in a less direct way is that of the reliability of the Bible. The Pharisees attempted to use the Scriptures to trap Jesus into saying something damning. However, Jesus' arguments were based in the Scriptures. *All* of Jesus' wisdom was based in Scripture. He pointed to the inspired prophecies of the Messiah to come, proving that God's Word, handed down through the generations, was still entirely reliable and trustworthy. We have that same assurance today.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand what hypocrisy is and why Jesus took it so seriously. *(Know)*
- Sense both the reliability of the Scriptures as well as God's fairness in looking at each person's heart instead of their lip service or per-formance. *(Feel)*
- Choose to examine their own motives and keep it honest with God and others. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 1: **"**The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Invite the students to think of rules or attitudes that seem to have a double standard. For example, are some students at school able to get away with more than others? In their homes, are boys allowed more freedom than girls? Or vice versa? Does someone give a lot of lip service to all the work they do when everyone else seems to do far more than they do?

Look at each example and discuss why the behavior might be considered hypocritical. How does it make the students feel?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Do you know that animals take on a different appearance to defend themselves, a phenomenon known as camouflaging? Take the owl butterfly, for instance. It has markings on its wings that mimic the eye of an owl. Scientists have found that when digital images of the owl butterfly's wings are presented to certain birds (who are natural predators of this butterfly) they react strongly and keep away. In some cases they react more strongly to the image of the butterfly's wings than to the image of the owl itself. Some other butterflies have markings that look like a cobra, which is also effective in scaring away predators. Other insects look like sticks or leaves, and in one case a locust has markings that makes it look like a bee or a wasp.

These creatures all appear to be something they are not in order to defend themselves. But while camouflaging is necessary in the animal kingdom to prevent the most vulnerable creatures from ending up at the bottom of the food chain, hypocrisy is disdained among humans and abhorred by God.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

You may not have seen a hypocritical creature, but you have probably had your own distasteful encounters with hypocritical people. However, we shouldn't be so quick to pont fingers. We can each be hypocritical, too, intentionally or unintentionally. Luckily, the problem isn't too big for God.

Out of the Story *for Teachers*

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Whom does Jesus criticize for hypocrisy?
- What does Jesus warn the people to avoid?
- Why are the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus?
- Where does Jesus turn for His wisdom? What does that tell us about the integrity and reliability of the Bible?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Mark 7:1-20; Zechariah 7; Isaiah 58:1-9.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The Pharisees were religious leaders in Judea. They were not only the most educated but also the most socially powerful. The people looked up to the Pharisees to tell them how to please God and how to properly live their lives. These religious leaders had a large responsibility to God's people; however, many of them were abusing the power they held.

The Pharisees convinced the people that they must give their money to sacred causes. They would find ways to use the donated money for their own gain. They established traditions and treated them as God's requirements, demanding that the people obey the man-made laws. They prayed loudly in the street, drawing attention to themselves and trying to appear more pious than others. The Pharisees also declared that poor people were poor because God was punishing them for their sins. If something bad happened to someone, they did not feel obliged to

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Encouraging Participation

When a vocal student makes a comment, ask for reactions from the other students. Many students are not comfortable answering a direct question from the teacher, but are more comfortable responding to a peer. Look for cues that a student is ready to contribute: direct eye contact, body language, slightly raising a finger. Give the student an opportunity to speak without causing embarrassment by saying something such as "Was there something you would like to say?" or "What do you think?"

Ask for special input from the students who may have a particular knowledge about the subject. Students are more apt to contribute when they know that they have helpful information that no one else can contribute or refute.

—Taken from: www.mcmaster.ca/cll/resources/teaching.tips/tip5.htm.

help that person because it would be "wrong" to get in the way of God's punishment on them. All the while, they were accumulating more money and more influence.

The Sadducees were a rival group of scholars. They studied just as hard as the Pharisees did, but they held different theological views. Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. They believed that the life a person had on earth was their only life. When Jesus discussed marriage in heaven, He was addressing this belief. Marriage, as they understood it, would not exist after death. Thus the Sadducees used the argument of the seven brothers having been married to the same woman to say that the resurrection was absurd since, if all the brothers were raised from the dead, who would be the husband of the woman? Jesus pointed out that the Sadducees were ignorant of the Scriptures and that the resurrection was to a life without marriage as we know it on earth.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were guilty of hypocrisy because they claimed to be God's representatives while having hardened hearts that were not surrendered to their heavenly Father. They betrayed their evil motives by asking questions that were supposed to stump Jesus and show His illegitimacy. Instead, their challenges backfired and exposed the rottenness in their souls. The religious leaders' influence over the Judean people arose from a religious culture in which many false ideas about God had become accepted. Jesus' intent was not to wrestle earthly power from these men (they were all men, no women). He simply told the truth and let people choose whether to accept it or not.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Hypocrisy begins in the heart. List five situations in which a hypocritical attitude or action might be tempting or easily exhibit itself. What is common about these situations? Make another list. This time, list five ways that we can deal with our own hypocritical attitudes before they start spilling over into our actions. After making the list as a class, discuss God's power to help us achieve the goal.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Jesus addressed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees head-on. He was concerned about the abuse the common people received at their hands. Not only did Jesus debate with the Pharisees; He always returned to the Scriptures to make His points. Jesus pointed out the truth, even the truth that the Pharisees misunderstood from God's Word. We can rely on God's Word just as heavily as Jesus Himself did.

Hypocrisy arises in many situations in life. There are times, as Jesus showed us in His debates with the Pharisees, in which a Christian's responsibility is to stand up for what is right and for people who are not being treated fairly. As Jesus demonstrated, violence should never be an option—no matter how frustrated, angry, or justified we might feel.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages (*or *Humble Hero*), chapters 66, 67.

Humble Hero is book 3 in a special adaptation of the Conflict of the Ages series, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Read more about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 22:15-46; 23; Mark 12:13-44; Luke 20:20-47; 21:1-4.

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what belongs to God



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keytext

"Jesus replied: ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.' "

(Matthew 22:37-40, NIV)

flashlight

"The first four of the Ten Commandments are summed up in the one great precept, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' The last six are included in the other, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Both these commandments are an expression of the principle of love. . . . When God has His rightful place on the throne of the heart, the right place will be given to our neighbor. We shall love him as ourselves. And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 607).

what do you think?

- Is it hypocritical to act "nicely" when you'd really rather not?
- Which matters more to God, our intentions or our actions?
- Is a certain level of insincerity necessary to smooth over conflicts or combustible situations?
- Jesus used some harsh-sounding words when He talked to the Pharisees. How do you reconcile His blunt words with our understanding of "Christian" attitude and behavior?
- How can an intelligent, well-thought-out answer bring glory to God?
- In what ways can each of us be hypocritical unintentionally?
- What hypocritical attitudes bother you the most?

did you know?

From Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered August 28, 1963: "But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: in the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

INTO THE STORY

"Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?'

"But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. 'Why are you trying to trap me?' he asked. 'Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose image is this? And whose inscription?'

"'Caesar's,' they replied.

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.'

"And they were amazed at him."

The Greatest Commandment

"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'

"'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.'

"'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.'

"When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

"As he taught, Jesus said, 'Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.'"

(Mark 12:13-17, 28-34, 38-40, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

When the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus, what did He quote from to answer them?

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If the commandments are based on love, is love a feeling, an action, an attitude, or a combination of all three? Explain.

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What principle can you derive from Jesus' statement to "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"?

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For whom was Jesus showing love when He talked about the "teachers of the law"?

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Jesus obviously didn't believe that smoothing things over was always the right course of action. When is it proper to "say it like you see it"?

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Compare Jesus' direct language with the smooth, flattering words of the Pharisees trying to trap him. What does this tell us about the integrity of a Christian's speech?

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punch lines

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" **(Matthew 5:37, NIV).**

"But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart'" **(1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).**

"Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD" **(Leviticus 19:17, 18, NIV).**

"The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip" **(Psalm 37:30, 31, NIV).**

"To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the proper answer of the tongue" **(Proverbs 16:1, NIV).**

further insight

"It is the motive that gives character to our acts, stamping them with ignominy or with high moral worth."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 615

Sabbath

Read Matthew 5:37.

Today's reading tells us to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." Words can be used to deceive more often than we notice. Do you ever use your tone of voice to make yourself sound worse when calling in sick to work or school? Do you ever promise to "look into" something without really meaning it? Do you ever promise to pray for someone and then never remember them in your prayers? How can you ensure that your words are not motivated by an urge to manipulate or play games? Think about how you talk. What are your motives behind your words?

Sunday

Read Leviticus 19:17, 18.

Keeping the peace is important, but there are times when it is proper to stand up and say something—stand up for what is right. When people are being put down or treated differently because of their ethnicity, skin color, political views, or gender, what do you think your responsibility is as a Christian? Does silence mean consent when you hear someone being mistreated?

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Jesus stood up for the common people who were being mistreated by the religious leaders. He didn't leave them to fight their battle alone. He said something when they didn't have the social power to say something for themselves. Who can you stand up for today?

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Monday

Read Matthew 22:37-40.

Love for God and love for your neighbor are the key points that God's law hangs upon. It's pretty simple. First, we must love God and put Him first. Next, we must love each other and think about other people's feelings and well-being before our own. Can you get it right with other people if you don't have it right with God? Is it possible to be right with God if we aren't taking care of each other? Explain.

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Tuesday

Read 1 Samuel 16:7.

Loving other people is a lot harder to *do* than to *say*. People frustrate us. They get in our way. They hurt our feelings, misunderstand us, and talk behind our backs. Sometimes people joke about their jobs, saying, "My job would be perfect if it weren't for the people!" Sometimes we just can't understand where some people are coming from. How can we empathize with people who frustrate us? How does putting our relationship with God first help us to empathize with others?

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Wednesday

Read Proverbs 16:1.

What is in our hearts ends up coming out of our mouths. If we are angry, it's hard to hide that in our tones, even if we manage to say the right words. It's been said that one of the hardest things to hide is being in love! When something happens on the inside of us, it is natural for that to come out of our mouths. The trick is to be right on the inside so that what comes out of our mouths brings glory to God. How can you put the law of God in your heart? Proverbs 16:1 says that the "proper answer of the tongue" comes from the Lord (NIV). What can you do to shift your focus toward God when you are the most tempted to lash out?

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Thursday

Read Jeremiah 17:9, 10.

It is common for people to try to put their best foot forward. We try to appear at our best when being looked at by other people. We will hide our true opinions if we think that they aren't popular. This isn't entirely honest, putting something false on display to hide the truth underneath. What things do you hide for the sake of appearances? What things do you pretend so that you will look better?

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Friday

Read Psalm 37:30, 31.

Are you ever tempted to "tweak the truth" a little bit to get what you want or need? Do you make yourself seem more rushed when you arrive late? Do you try to make yourself seem more helpless when asking for an extension on the due date of a paper? How can we trust God enough to be honest and straightforward and let Him sort out the rest?

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this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages or (*Humble Hero*), chapters 66; 67.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.