

LESSON 20 Devotional

Rules vs. Values

When Jesus spent time on earth the Pharisees had a firm grip on the religious activities of the day. The Pharisees seemed to be striving for spiritual perfection. Not only did they emphasize the 613 laws God gave the Israelites in the first five books of the Old Testament, they also drafted detailed explanations and rules for complying with the law.

For example, the Ten Commandments clearly and simply declared that the Jews were not to do any work on the Sabbath. For the Pharisees, however, this was not adequate. They defined 39 categories of work not to be done, then each category was broken down into minute detail.

They carried it to such a degree that even “carrying” something on the Sabbath needed to be broken down between what you could carry in public versus what could be carried in private.

The vast level of detail set the stage for many Jewish people to look for loopholes. The people were so focused on complying with the thousands of rules that it was near impossible for anyone to comply, or to even remember why the rule was important.

Jesus’ approach was so different from the Pharisees that it’s no wonder they wanted him dead. The Sermon on the Mount is the first major teaching of Jesus we find in Matthew 5. He begins His teaching with what we today call today the Beatitudes.

Instead of beating the people down with rules as the Pharisees commonly did, Jesus instead began his sermon by focusing on the values He desired for His followers. Jesus affirmed and blessed those who modeled the following values:

- **The poor in spirit**
- **Those who mourn**
- **The meek**
- **Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**

- **The merciful**
- **The pure in heart**
- **The peacemakers**
- **Those who are persecuted due to righteousness**

Jesus then dug into the laws that the Pharisees had carefully crafted and revealed how futile it was to think they could ever be perfect.

For instance, the Pharisees prided themselves on not being murderers, yet Jesus told them if you're angry with your brother you're guilty of murder in your heart. His point was, their rules and their loopholes would not get them into Heaven.

The only hope they had of seeing Heaven was to accept Jesus as their savior. It must have cut them to the quick when Jesus said, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Many workplaces have become like the Pharisees with policies and procedures so vast that no one can ever fully comply, nor can they even remember why the policy was written. Businesses, however, that share their values and tell their employees why these values are important to them are a stark contrast to the rules-based organizations. In which type of organization would you prefer to work?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read aloud Matthew 5:3-12. Why do you believe Jesus began His sermon with the Beatitudes? How well do you think it resonated with the audience? What do you think the Pharisees thought of His sermon and why?

2. Share with the group about a past job you've had that was either rules-oriented or values-oriented. How did you feel about working there and why?

3. Is your organization more rules-based or values-based? In what kind of environment do you think your existing and future employees would prefer to work? What would you need to do to shift your culture accordingly?
