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Beware of the Scribes

Mark 12:38-44

Prayer: *Father, again I just, I thank you for gathering us together, I thank you for just the special day that this is, the day that we focus on you and the cross and what you've done for us. So we pray in a special way, Lord, that your Spirit would be here, that you would guide us, direct us, open up our eyes and ears and again, Lord, that you would give us ears to listen, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, this is that special day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died he met with his disciples and celebrated for him the last Passover supper. This is found in Matthew 26:26-29. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until*

that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

So Jesus took bread and wine and he offered them up as symbols of his blood and his flesh and he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they can symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat the remembrance of this sacrifice and it's what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves and asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins and then participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

So we've been following the life of Christ, we've been following it the gospel of Mark and Jesus is now at the end of his public ministry. He knows that his time is short. He's had a whole series of confrontations with the religious leaders and he's clearly goading them into seeing him as an existential threat. And every one of these confrontations, they all end badly for the religious leaders who don't even realize that they're directly attempting to confront God himself in the flesh. So Jesus responds and he responds with perfect logic and amazing grace, then he sums

up what he really thinks of the whole lot of them in our text this morning. This is taken from *Mark 12:38-44*. It says: *And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."*

These are folks who have contracted and I mean willingly contracted an ego disease that's now in its terminal phase. They'd become addicted to praise and to honor and glory. And Jesus goes on to describe the symptoms of this disease. They like to walk around in long robes, they love to be greeted in the marketplace, they love the best seats at feasts, and they love to make long prayers.

Jesus goes on to say these folks devour widows' houses because they take it upon themselves to advise widows as to what they should do with the estate when their husbands die and leave it to them. And so these folks wind up becoming the worse type of financial advisers because they often manage to steer widows' estates into their own pockets, much like prosperity preachers do today. You want to honor God? Well, honor God's servant. But you know the problem with this type of teaching is that it's almost too easy to see this type of teaching in others and not see it in ourselves.

You see, Jesus is painting a picture here and it's a caricature, if you will, it's a caricature of someone who's so lacking in self-awareness that these don't even see how outlandish they appear to everyone else except themselves. The problem is there's some of that in every one of us.

Jesus once told another story about a religious leader who had the same kind of ego disease. It takes place in *Luke 18:9-14*. It says this: *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

I tell you the most striking, the most humbling thing about this story is this statement that Jesus utters parenthetically about the Pharisee. This is what he says. He says, *"The Pharisee standing*

by himself prayed thus." Now what that means is that the bulk of this story takes place not in some audible dressing down that the Pharisee is giving to this humble sinner but actually in the thoughts that are flashing through his mind as he's watching the sinner beat his breast. This whole exchange could have taken place in two seconds inside the Pharisee's mind and Jesus is just able to read that mind.

But you know what? Every single one of us has done that at one time or another. I mean, how many times have I looked at someone and had those same kind of fleeting thoughts come into my mind? I mean, just last week I was at a wedding, I was there at the reception and there were folks there getting a little tipsy, dropping F-bombs left and right. You know how easy it is to sit there and have those same fleeting thoughts that the Pharisees had. "Man, I'm glad I'm not that guy." "Oh, Lord, how lucky you are to have me on your team." "I go to church, I tithe, I try to do my best to be a good person."

You got to understand, mind you, the Pharisee was not saying this out loud. I mean, these could be just the fleeting thoughts that come into your head and Jesus is identifying those thoughts in that Pharisee. And it just points out what a universal issue this is, you see, every one of us has an ego problem. Every one of us has

an internal craving for honor and glory that we inherited from our first father, Adam. It's a craving that needs to be redirected vertically towards God and his kingdom rather than man and earth's kingdom.

You see, Adam was in the midst of paradise itself when he listened to the serpent's lie that he was entitled to something that belonged to God himself. If you remember the serpent said of the forbidden fruit, he said: *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* You'll be like God. See, when Adam ate that fruit he started a spiritual disease that not only affected him but every one of us all down to you and me. And it's an inbred desire for the glory that belongs to God alone. We are creatures who were created in the very image of God in order to glorify God; and when Adam turned away from God, he found himself centered on the only thing that was close and that was himself.

You know, the first effects of Adam's fall was the discovery by Adam and Eve that they were naked. I mean how in the world can you be naked and not know it unless your focus is so completely outside of you and on God and his creation. I mean Adam's sin made his entire focus implode inward upon himself and hence, he and Eve noticed their nakedness. And ever since then as a part of the fall

man has been locked in this battle between God and his ego, and our natural fallen state has us focused not on God but on us. That has become our natural religion.

You see, our world today defines health and sanity as the ability to tune in and pay attention not to God but to our own inner voice. We're told over and over again to listen first and foremost to our authentic selves and that we must take whatever efforts and pain is required to hear what it is our hearts are trying to tell us. Folks, that's perfectly backwards. I mean as believers, we know God says exactly the opposite.

Jeremiah 17:9 says: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Proverbs 28:26 says: Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

And Jesus himself, he tells the heart is absolutely untrustworthy. In *Mark 7:21*, he says: *"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."* Instead, this is what God says in *Proverbs 3:5-6*, he says: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not*

lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:7 he says: Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

You see, scripture tells us that the authentic self is so buried under layers and layers of what we call sin that it's virtually impossible to trust in what it says. And so today we have two completely different worldviews that center on the role that we personally play living out our lives. On the one hand we have the world, which says you have to be true to yourself, as opposed to Jesus who says, no, you have to die to yourself. The world says you've got to listen to your heart with utmost care and dedication and God says, do not listen to your heart; it is deceptive and completely untrustworthy.

There's no area that's more critical to living life successfully that's more argued about today than the self. And there are two completely different sets of voices that clamor to be heard on both sides of this issue. These religious leaders that Jesus had this confrontation with, they had chosen to listen to their hearts instead of the scriptures that they were entrusted with. And they couldn't even see how their longing for the best seats, for the best honors and for the long prayers that pointed them out as special along with all the other affectations they had embraced, it

all stemmed from their own deceptive hearts. It only wound up making them think they were something better, something different from everyone else. And so they fancied themselves as being God's great defenders when in fact it was God himself who made them public enemy number one. Understand, they wound up being called by Jesus himself snakes, hypocrites, whitewashed tombs. I mean if there's any category of human being you do not want to be in, it is that one. But make no mistake about it, every one of us has within ourselves the very same drives, the very same temptations. And until you grapple with the idea that you could genuinely become one of those people, you are still in danger of joining their ranks.

See, in one sense the evangelicals -- I mean the Pharisees were the evangelicals of their day. These are folks who were set apart uniquely living lives that were dedicated to God and his revealed will in the scripture. And in spite of that, they managed to serve God's enemy instead.

So we ask how in the world could that happen? Well it's actually kind of simple, I mean, what happened is they listened to the wrong set of voices. You see, there are two incredibly important things that the voice of God will tell you that you might not want to hear, and it has to do with our relationship to God and the concept of sanctification. I've used this phrase many, many times. It's

summed up in one statement and that is God loves you and you are full of it. And the first part, the God loves you part, I think all of us know. *1 John 4:19* says: *We love because he first loved us.* And we know that God for reasons known only to himself went after us while we were still sinners. I mean, he wasn't responding to our love with his love because we had no love for him. And yet in spite of that he still sent his Son to die for us.

1 John 4:10 says: *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* So the fact is God chose us and he chose us before the foundations of the world were even established. And these again, these are not my words, these are God's words. *Ephesians 1:3-6* says: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

So that tells us that God reached into our pasts knowing precisely what our future was to be and because of that, we realize that no sin that you and I will ever commit now or in the future is ever

going to be a surprise or a shock to God. I mean in essence God has said that he's chosen us as adopted sons and daughters to be uniquely shaped into the very image of Jesus himself as a reflection of his glorious grace, and that means that God has committed from before you and I were ever born to shaping and molding us uniquely into the image of his Son, and we call that process sanctification. But it also means that God has seen us, warts and all, and has still declared his love for us and his determination to use our life circumstances to make us a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the reason why we quote *Romans 8:28* so frequently, you know, *God causes all things to work together for good*, the reason we quote that so much is that verse is actually life defining, and it's life defining to realize that every single thing that happens in our lives -- good, bad, and ugly -- is designed and superintended by God to shape you and mold you into the very image of his Son. And it's all summed up in this one statement of God's in the very next verse, *Romans 8:29*: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*

Well, the more you know that, the more you're able to affirm God's undying love for you, the more you can handle the second part which is the part that says that you and I are full of it. And it is a

fancy Greek term called "skubalon" which means "refuse" or "dung." Practically speaking it means it's an ability to sense or grapple with the baloney, the refuse, the dung that each of our own lives exists, in each of our own lives exists by what we call ego.

You see, God sees us exactly as we are, as sinners unvarnished by the trappings of wealth or education or social status whatsoever, and he's chosen to fix his love on us in that unattractive state.

I mean, I look at it as a diamond and that diamond is surrounded by layers and layers of junk, much like the layers that you would find in an onion. You know, when an onion looks all funky and bad, all you have to do is kind of peel that outside layer and you have this fresh, green, shiny new layer. I believe God sees us as that diamond that is covered by layers and layers of that same potential ugliness that the religious leaders had but he's absolutely determined to peel that off layer by layer by layer, and that's what we call sanctification.

I mean, the religious leaders, they saw themselves as a cut above because they made the primary error of seeing their goodness as a function of someone else's badness, and that's what most of us do. I mean, we compare ourselves with ourselves. You know, you ask someone on the street, "Are you a good person," you're most likely

going to hear a response like, "Well, I'm not perfect," but then you're going to hear a series of comparisons. "I may not be the best moral person but at least I'm not the worse." "I may cheat on my taxes but at least I don't beat my wife." That's claiming your goodness based on someone else's badness. And Paul said very clearly of the Corinthians who were doing just that, he said in *2 Corinthians 10:12*: *When they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*

So you see, the solution to morality by comparison, it really is still a matter of comparison but in the case of believers in the case of sanctification, it involves comparing yourself not with your fellow man but with Christ himself because that's a standard that will always keep you humble. It will always keep you from falling to the trap that the religious leaders fell into.

You see, in addition to being our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ is also our example. Listen to what Peter said in *1 Peter 2:21*. He said: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* And Paul went on to say in *1 Corinthians*: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.* And Jesus himself said in *John 13:15*: *For I have given you an example, that you also should do*

just as I have done to you.

And so sanctification happens as you grow in Christ's example if, if -- big if -- if you're willing to hear him. Well, how does he speak? Well, he speaks through his word; he speaks through circumstances; he speaks through people. And he'll speak to those layers of sin and pride and show you that they have to go.

I mean, those layers of sin started out in my life as a new believer with the old standard, sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. I thought they were the greatest sins and it turns out that they were the easiest sins to deal with. It's sins of pride and arrogance that bury themselves that are much, much harder to root out and escape.

I could always find somebody worse than me to compare myself when it came to obvious sins but when you compare yourself with the sinless example that Christ left, you have no place to go but up. I mean, I could look horizontally at lots of folks living lives worse than me but not when I look to Christ. And so my obvious sins in this case, they were easy to shed but then God's Holy Spirit began moving me deeper and deeper into the more difficult layers of pride, of ambition, of selfishness, and he's still leading me into that today. And again, who does it? Well, God's

Holy Spirit does it. He does it through personal conviction or input from others or by the scripture itself. And what he does is he's peeling back one ugly layer after another only to reveal a shiny new layer underneath that, and the more I'm willing to listen, the more God's going to show me that even that shiny layer isn't really shiny at all compared to his brilliance. And so you peel that layer off and you feel pretty good about sin that you've hardly even recognized before only to realize there's a lot more layers to go. And even then you realize that this sanctification process, it goes on for your entire life and it doesn't stop until you get to heaven, and I suspect it continues even there.

And what's going on is God's sanctifying Holy Spirit knowingly or unknowingly is growing you more and more Christ-like. It's that sanctification process, that's the one that the religious leaders absolutely refused to undergo. And that refusal to listen brought them to the place where they were actually actively opposing the very living God they were claiming to represent.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I just want us to take a minute or two to ask yourself, am I willing to pay attention, am I willing to really listen to what God is telling me through circumstances, through people, through scripture itself, am I willing to listen to what God is telling me if it challenges my ego

if it's something that I tend to dismiss?

You see, as soon as you sense your spirit, you sense your spirit shutting down or making excuses or making comparisons with others in order to make yourself feel comfortable, that's the time that God is saying, "pay attention. Stop. Listen." *1 Corinthians 11:28* says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

I repeat this warning every month. I tell you communion is such a serious undertaking that to enter into it unworthily is to court disaster. I say if you're not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister or anyone else outside in this world before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then don't participate; just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating, err on the side of caution, get right with God and the body of Christ first.

I also point out you can also make the mistake of thinking you have to be absolutely flawless in order to receive communion; and that, too, is a mistake. I point out that being a child of God doesn't mean you don't sin, it doesn't mean you don't fail, it means you recognize that salvation is a gift that no one is capable of ever earning simply by being good. And I repeat each month this quote from Dane Ortlund who says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do."

And I also want to point out that when we fail, we are aware that we've sinned because we have God's Holy Spirit now living within us. It's God's spirit that convicts us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who wants to forgive and cleanse us, who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you're spotless or sinless, it means that you understand that when you sin, you have an advocate with the Father. And an advocate is simply somebody speaking on your behalf. That's Christ literally in heaven itself. *1 John says: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with*

the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

And that's what gives us the ability to do this. Because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, because of that we're free to eat from his table. And so I said if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he's purchased for you. He lived the life we were supposed to live, he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy for this very moment.

Understand, God can't love you any more tomorrow than he does right here, right now, today. And from before the foundations of the earth God loved you to the max. God saw back then every sin you would ever commit. So ask God for the grace, the wisdom and the courage to open your ears especially when you don't want to hear what he's saying.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says this: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. So take, and eat.*

As the elders will begin distributing the cup, you know, I've often

spoken about a man that I first met when I was a brand new Christian. There was this fellow in church, this is out in California, a fellow told me that this was the holiest person they knew. And he was an older man, I was 24 years old, and the more I got to know him, the more I respected his walk with Christ.

One day I asked him, I said, "How did you get to be so holy?" And he just burst out laughing. He thought it was an incredibly silly question. He was being very kind to me. But he said this to me, he said, "You know, the closer you get to God, the more you find out that the things that you thought were minor inconsistencies or smaller sins, they grow to be bigger and bigger as the light gets brighter and brighter." He said, "The rest of your life you're going to find as you draw closer to Christ that he's going to illuminate those parts in your life that you thought were fine but were actually quite sinful." He said, "When that happens, you're going to start seeing them as he sees them, as dung, as refuse, as something that needs to be thrown out as you pursue each new layer, just like the onion." And it's right there that you find out something that is absolutely astounding and that is that God has always seen that ugly layer, the layer that you thought that was hidden. And having seen that layer, he's never stopped declaring that he loves you.

And that's what Paul meant when he said in *Romans 5:8*: *But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*, and that's what I mean when I say, "God loves you and you're full of it." Let me give I was personal example as it applies to me.

I mean, for years I just pictured myself as a defender of the faith, somebody who had been gifted by God to share that gift and I saw that as my primary motive and really it wasn't. And God took a good deal of time and a good while to finally get me to listen.

And what God did was he used scripture, he used circumstances, and he used people to speak to me about it and very slowly and very carefully took that layer apart by pointing out to me that a large part of my desire to share the gospel was actually related to my ego and my desires, and that my motivation was actually a lot closer to those religious leaders than Jesus dealt with than to the noble motives that I had ascribed to it.

God was pointing out to me that it turned out that I, too, longed for my own versions of walking in long robes and greetings in the marketplace and having the best of seats at the feasts. And it may not have mirrored the desires of the Pharisees, but in my own way God was pointing out to me how acutely I desired to sound smart and

clever while at the same time defending the gospel.

What God was telling me, he basically said, if I stripped down your motivation to its bare bones, I find very little of me and a whole lot of you, but I still love you. He didn't speak audibly but he clearly communicated it to me when I stopped to really listen. That's an incredibly ugly layer of onion to discover. And how did God do that? Well, he did it by showing me myself compared not with others but with Christ himself. And the scripture shows me what Christ's standard actually is in ways I can't refuse. I mean, God is constantly calling us not to compare ourselves with ourselves but with Christ himself, because God wants us to think and to act like Christ himself.

I mean look at *Philippians 2:5*. It says: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

I mean if I was truly of a servant mind, if I truly had the mind of Christ here, I would never be selfishly thinking about sounding good or looking good or trying to impress anybody like those religious leaders were. My focus would have been entirely on

serving and pleasing the Master, but I have to be honest and confess it's not. At least not yet.

I mean the fact that I still care about these things means I still have a lot further to go. But here's the beautiful part of it. The beautiful part of it is realizing that God wants to show me how short of the mark of his perfection I've come while at the very same time demonstrating to me that he loves me. You see, we usually pit one against the other. As long as I'm attractive, well then I'm loveable. But God says in many, many ways there's aspects of your life that are incredibly unattractive and yet I have never stopped loving you.

And that realization that God loves me and I'm still full of it is the essence of that brand new layer of the onion that God is constantly exposing. And having found that new layer you very quickly find out that there's layers underneath that and underneath that and underneath that, and so on and so on. For the rest of your life you're going to be pursuing a holiness that will always remain out of your grasp because you're aiming for the perfection of Christ. But understand, it's a happy pursuit and it's a happy pursuit because all along God is assuring you that he does love you even though you are full of it.

The first sign that you've got an ego problem is thinking you don't have an ego problem. When you look back on your life, you hopefully realize that the journey of sanctification has made you more and more Christ-like and more and more holy, not as the Pharisees understood it as being worthy of the best seats and the holy greetings but as someone who is still full of it and yet beloved by the Lord. The religious leaders that Jesus was confronting, they never even got close to that.

And so as you take the cup, I would ask you to ask God to reveal to you those things that prove that you are still full of it, those things that you don't really want to hear, those things that God has seen from the start and wants to peel away from the image of Christ that he wants you to become. So just take a moment and ask God to say those things to me, God, that I don't want to hear. Just take a moment.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. So take and drink.

This is the part that we call head, hands and feet, it's where we're trying to find a practical way of putting into practice what

it means to worship Jesus particularly on communion Sundays. And I just want to tell you a story about something that happened a long, long time ago because it has a practical application to this.

Church was still kind of in its infancy, I forget how many years it was, there was a young man that came to the church and he figured that he had a pulpit ministry and he really didn't. And the elders and us, and we gathered together, he grew very frustrated that he wasn't given the pulpit. And so he gathered a number of fellows together and demanded a meeting of the leaders of the church, and he railed against the church and he railed and he said that, you know, he was a very gifted speaker and he was being denied the pulpit.

And so we had this lengthy meeting and at the end of the meeting, we were just sitting around, and I said, "I need to ask you a question." And he said, "What?" I said, "Who speaks jackass into your life?" And he looked at me like I had two or three heads. And I said, "When I'm a jackass, I have a wife that will say, 'Hey, you're being a jackass.'" I said, "Who does that for you?" I said, "I don't suspect that your wife does."

The point that I was making is that you have to have somebody, somewhere, somehow who's willing to speak jackass into your life,

who's willing to say, "guess what, that was not good what you just did," or that was not wise or that was not a good thing to do. That's not easy. That's not fun. It's not fun to hear that kind of stuff. It's not fun to tell that to somebody. But part of the whole process of sanctification is hearing stuff you don't want to hear and not reacting incredibly defensively right off the bat and just batting it out of the park and saying, no, but saying what is there of substance in this, that this person is saying?

It's incredibly important that you do two things. One, that you be willing to speak jackass into somebody's life that you have earned that right to -- not just anybody, but somebody who you've earned that right to; and number two, be willing to hear somebody speak that you are being a jackass. That's part and parcel of what the sanctification process is all about. That's how it goes forward. That's God peeling the onion layer by layer; and he doesn't do it with pleasant stuff. He does it with stuff you don't want to hear.

So the next time somebody is sharing with you something along those lines and you feel your defenses going up and you feel you're starting to get ready to fight back, just stop and think for a moment and ask God's Spirit, is this something that you're trying to get my attention about? Is this something that I need to think on? Is this something I need to pray about? Is this something I

need to ferret the truth out of? That's part of the process.

You look at the Pharisees and the scribes, they never went through that process. And the ones who were telling them you're a jackass was Jesus himself. God was telling them that. They refused to listen. They had obviously spent lots and lots of time refusing to listen to anybody else before they would refuse to listen to God himself.

So I would just leave you with this thought. The next time somebody shares with you something difficult, take a moment to ask God to ferret the truth out of it. And the next time you are challenged to offer something difficult to somebody, pray and work your way as much as you can, as easily as you can, but be willing to say it. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for your grace, I thank you for this difficult process of sanctification, the process that brings us layer by layer closer to who you are. And every single one of those layers that you're stripping off is painful, every single one of those layers occurs by us learning things that we didn't know or realize beforehand. And so I pray, Lord, for each of us as we go through this process that we would be listening to you, that we would be comparing our lives to you and not to the world where it's

easy. I pray that you would give us the grace, the strength, the insight and the wisdom to do just that. And I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.