

Week 29 Ordinary Time - 2026

Isaiah 45:4-6; Ps 95; Thessalonians 1:1-5. 19-20; Matthew 22:15-21

It may be that Jesus has something important to say about the separation of Church and State when he says to the Pharisees and the Herodians, '*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*'.¹ Much has been made of it, but I think that Jesus was less interested in that than we might be. I believe that he was much more concerned – and angered – with the hypocrisy in the hearts of those who brought their question to him.

What is hypocrisy?

Hypocrisy is the deliberate misleading of others impression of you by purposefully saying something or supporting certain moral ideals but acting in a way contrary to those ideal when it is to your benefit.

Hypocrisy is the purposeful hiding your own failings while highlighting and condemning those same failings in others.

About 6 years ago members of the environmentalist group Extinction Rebellion went around gluing themselves to motorways in protest against the use of combustion engines. They claimed that the disruption they caused by grinding traffic to a halt at rush hour was morally justified by the importance of the need to save the world. Thousands of motorists were late to work, late to school, missed hospital appointments in

motorway misery. Caught on camera a founder of Extinction Rebellion, Dr. Gail Bradbook, admitted that she drove a diesel car to take her children to rugby and football because she could not afford an electric car.² This seems like rank hypocrisy. Perhaps Dr. Gail should have glued herself down at the bottom of her own driveway.

So what is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees?

But first, who are the Pharisees? They emerged in ancient Israel, about the 3rd century, after the return from exile in Babylon.³ The Jewish Kingdom is destroyed and what emerges is a hybrid of state and religious authority. The Jewish people are surrounded by pagans, and there were Jews who felt that must separate themselves entirely from the pagans and not inter-marry (read the book of Esra). Then the Greeks arrive and certain devout Jews had to fight to keep their religion alive. (read the books of the Maccabees). They called themselves the *Chasidim* or "pious ones".⁴ This was the birth source of the Pharisees. By the time of Christ, their devotedness, dignity and faithfulness in the face of death and persecution earned them the greatest respect with the Jewish people, so much so that they replaced the priests as the source of religious authority: although they could not serve in the temple, they could preach and teach. This is why Jesus Himself refers to the pharisees as sitting in the seat of Moses.⁵ It is undoubtedly the Pharisees who ensured the survival of the Jewish faith during the Hellenistic period. Much of what the Pharisees taught also

¹ Matt 22:16a

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/08/23/extinction-rebellion-founder-admits-drives-diesel-car/> accessed 15 Oct 2026

³ Entry under 'Pharisees' <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11789b.htm> accessed 16 Oct 2026

⁴ the word Chasidim (חסידים) is Hebrew for "pious ones" or "devout ones", from the root chesed — the Hebrew word meaning steadfast love, covenant faithfulness, and mercy. To be a chasid was to be someone wholly devoted to God's covenant. Truthly App 16 Oct 2026

⁵ "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice." (Matthew 23:2-3)

Week 29 Ordinary Time - 2026

prepared the way for the coming of Jesus including the resurrection of the dead, being a chosen people, and a reward or punishment in the afterlife.

Such authority was betrayed by human weakness. Religion became rigid and formalised. Decent of bloodline to Abraham became obsessive. Exclusion of those outside of Israel made the faith nationalistic. Teaching became arrogant and obscured deeper spiritual truths. A devotion to God which should have opened doors and allowed people to breath became inward looking, & suffocating.

This is why Jesus is so very angry with the Pharisees and calls them hypocrites many times. They have so much, they have done so much for their people, and yet are so involved in their own prestige that they cannot see that the Son of God - the answer to their patient waiting - is before them. The Pharisees were not wrong to love the Law, but they failed to recognize the Lawgiver. And this is their ultimate hypocrisy: they hate Jesus so much that they are willing to break and kill God.⁶

Being called a Pharisee nowadays is usually intended as an insult. But in many ways we are called to be like the Pharisees: brave, knowledgeable, pious, idealist, pure, passionate. I am sure this is why Jesus called Paul, who was a Pharisee, to be his Apostle But these are only useful traits if they are put to the correct service of God. I am sure this is why God struck Paul blind, because this is what he was. Jesus turned him from hypocrite to one of His holy ones.

We have much to learn; otherwise, we end up serving ourselves, or an idea, with misguided passion in the name of God and miss seeing Him at all.

⁶ They detest the supporters of King Herod, who is the Roman installed ruler of Judea, but they are being friendly with these Herodians because they hate Jesus more. The second is that their question is couched in such a way which they think flatter him. *'Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed but*

*appearances.*⁶ Well, this is true, and they are counting on this honesty. If he is honest and says the tax should not be paid, Jesus will be condemned as being an enemy of Caesar. If he is honest and says the tax should be paid, then he is the enemy of his people. Either way they win. But this is not the worst