

Jesus And The Pharisees

Introduction. A casual reading of the New Testament shows that there is no doubt Jesus was often in conflict with the Jewish sect known as the Pharisees. In this lesson we want to examine why there was conflict.

When we study the Bible, we find a different picture than is often expressed by our religious friends in and out of the church. We encounter people who think that strict obedience to the Bible is what Pharisaism was then and is now (only in a "Christian" form). Is this so? Or, does the very term "Pharisee" serve a purpose for lawless, religious people to frighten people away from trying to obey all of the will of God lest we be considered "Pharisaical"?

I. ***Common Misconceptions Today***

A. A strictness about biblical authority is modern Pharisaism.

1. The Pharisees were not nearly as strict about God's authority expressed in the Law of Moses as they were strict in regard to their favorite human traditions (Luke 7:29-30).
2. It was not a part of their vocabulary to talk about "the will of God," though this was the central theme of Jesus' life and teaching (Mark 3:35; John 5:30; 6:39). The Father's will was constantly on Jesus' mind, tongue, and actions.
3. When all evidence is considered, we conclude that the modern "Pharisees" are those who are religious and respectful toward their own human traditions above the will of God, and who do not often appeal to the will of God as their authority.

B. Strict moral codes of ethics is a sign of modern Pharisaism.

1. The Pharisees were very loose in their personal moral code of ethics. Our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:19-20).
2. The contrast between the standards of Jesus and the Pharisees is seen several times.
 - a) Jesus shows that they were hypocrites but altogether different inside where God sees their true character (Matthew 23:3, 25-26).
 - b) Jesus shows that they were often dishonest in their dealings with others (Matthew 23:4). Furthermore, they did not care about the lost (Matthew 9:11).
 - c) They ignored the Law of Moses on key moral issues like keeping oaths, murder, and covetousness (Matthew 23:16-22, 27-33; Luke 16:14).

- d) They brought a woman guilty of adultery before Jesus, but could not throw a stone because they were guilty themselves (John 8:3-4).
- 3. When people claim to love and respect God, but hold to loose moral standards, they are Pharisees. Strict moral standards were never criticized by Jesus.
- C. Demanding book, chapter, and verse preaching is Pharisaism.
 - 1. It would be impossible to find Jesus rebuking people who insist that the Bible, and nothing but the Bible, be preached. Jesus spoke of the scriptures in one way or another in all of His personal temptations, and in His dealings with others.
 - 2. Jesus rebuked their blindness in reading the scriptures, not the reading of the scriptures themselves.
 - a) In them they should have been able to see types, shadows, and prophecies of Jesus (John 5:39).
 - b) Jesus rebuked "not knowing the scriptures," the setting aside the commandments of God in preference to human traditions, but not scriptural teaching.
 - 3. We cannot grant that book, chapter, and verse preaching posed or poses any problem (2 Timothy 3:16-4:4). It maintains the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-21).
- D. Challenging human traditions is Pharisaism.
 - 1. It was not the Pharisees that challenged traditions. It was Jesus. It was the lack of challenging human traditions that made the Pharisees what they were.
 - 2. It is here, on the matter of human traditions, that got Jesus to raise His protests against them (Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:3-4).

II. ***Jesus Never Rebuked The Pharisees Because ...***

- A. They were strict in regard to God's law.
 - 1. They were strict about their traditions, but loose regarding God's law. Their lack of commitment to the scriptures meant they would ignore or bend the rules to suit themselves, and bring up scriptures only when it was in their best interest to do so.
 - 2. Modern-day Pharisees despise the Jesus-affirmed method of establishing Bible authority: command (John 12:49-50), example (John 5:19), and necessary inference (John 7:21-24)
- B. They wanted scriptural authority for all they did together in temple and synagogue.
 - 1. Jesus cleansed the temple because they allowed what God never authorized (John 2:12-17). They did not have authority to make God's house a house of merchandise.

2. The modern Pharisees are making church (God's spiritual house) a house of fun, entertainment, and social programs.
- C. They were too strict in regard to standards of righteous behavior.
 1. The evidence shows that they were very loose regarding the standards of righteousness expressed in the Law of Moses. Jesus taught higher and therefore stricter standards of righteous behavior in Matthew 5:1-7:29.
 2. Modern Pharisees hate the preaching of important moral issues such as immodest dress, gambling, drinking, dancing, mixed swimming, etc.
- D. They were against human traditions that set aside the commandments of the Lord.
 1. They were for the traditions of their fathers even when they set aside the commandments of the Lord.
 2. Modern Pharisees will employ ideas that set aside the commandments of the Lord: sprinkling for baptism, infant baptism, divisive names and creeds that prevent the unity for which Jesus prayed.

III. ***You Might Be A Pharisee If ...***

- A. You are more concerned about your traditions than you are the word of God.
 1. We all understand that every congregation has certain "traditions," or ways of doing their work that is perfectly within the realm of judgment.
 2. Brethren understand that they are not "gospel" truth. Sadly, some are intent on creating new traditions in a misguided effort to get away from old, "traditional" ways. They accomplish nothing except becoming more ingrained in tradition!
- B. You are more concerned about how you appear to men than what God thinks of you (Matthew 6:1-8, 16-18).
- C. You are more critical of others than you are of yourself (Matthew 7:1-5).
 1. The Pharisee had no sense of his own sinfulness (Luke 18:9-14). Most Christians I know seem to have a very real sense of unworthiness and failings.
 2. We need to be more critical of ourselves than others. This practice gives us a sense of unworthiness and huge appreciation for the grace and mercy of God, and it causes us to be very compassionate and merciful toward others.
 3. It helps us to develop skills to gently lead souls out of error and into truth, knowing that others have had a difficult time getting us to

see truths we were not able to see for a while due to blindness and pride.

D. You emphasize only a few choice details but neglect weightier matters like love, justice, and faith (Matthew 23:23).

1. Tithing down to minute details was a hobby-horse with them, while mercy, justice, and faith were severely neglected.
2. We need to major in majors and minor in minors. We need to prioritize the issues that God has prioritized without leaving the others undone.
3. It seems that putting the kingdom first along with His righteousness, not our own select issues, is what we should emphasize.

Conclusion. We want to make sure we are striving to be more like Jesus and less like the Pharisees. However, in this lesson we hope to accomplish getting a clearer and more accurate understanding. What were the real issues? Was Jesus disturbed by their strictness or their blindness and looseness regarding God's law?

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