

## The Pharisee in All of Us

Of the three major religious societies of Judaism at the time of the New Testament (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes), the Pharisees were often the most vocal and influential.

*Who or what is a Pharisee?*

- The word Pharisee means “separated one,” that is, one who had separated himself from the corrupting influence of Hellenism in his zeal for Biblical Law.
- They were punctilious in observing laws regarding ceremonial purity. They could not purchase items of food or drink from a “sinner” for fear of ceremonial defilement, nor could they eat at the house of a sinner. However, a Pharisee could entertain a “sinner” in his own home, providing the “sinner” with clothes to wear, since the sinner’s clothes might be ceremonially impure.
- Paul refers to the Pharisees as “the strictest sect of our religion.” *Acts 26:5*; the Jewish historian Josephus states that the Pharisees “appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately.”
- Tradition, in Pharisaic thought, began as a commentary on the Law but it was ultimately raised to level of Law itself. *Matt. 12, 1-8*.
- The early piety of those who had separated themselves at great cost was exchanged for an attitude of pride in the observance of legal precepts and the minutia of the Law. The Pharisees meant to obey God, but eventually they became so devoted and extremist in *very limited* parts of The Law (plus all that they themselves added to it), that they became blind to The Messiah when He was in their very midst.

Jesus has strong words for the Pharisees because they misrepresented God to the people. The tradition of the Pharisees had largely neglected the real intent of the Law. They had added legalistic burdens and traditions that most people couldn’t keep and thus they were actually keeping people from turning to the Lord.

*Matthew 15, 1-9:*

Then some of the Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

And He answered and said to them “*And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your Father and Mother;’ but you say ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, ‘Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,’ he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrine the precepts of men.’*”

The Pharisees thought that their religion would make them right before the Lord, when actually their religion was keeping them from the Lord.

Similarly, many church-going people today stand by a host of religious traditions and observances they hope will be sufficient for them to gain entry to heaven. Christianity has its own set of traditions just like the Jewish leadership had, and many of these traditions are not in the Word of God. Why have things been added to the Word of God?

Concerning outward religious show and feigned piety:

*“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them. And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos 5, 21-24.*

Christ says, *“therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and it fell, and great was its fall.” Matt 7, 24-27.*

Thus the traditions and “add-ons” are nowhere near as important as the Word of God.

Jesus continues, *“Hear and understand. Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man” Matt 15, 10-11.*

*“Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.” Matt 15, 17-20.*

Concerning the attitude of pride and self-righteousness: *Luke 18, 9-14*

*“And He also told this parable to certain one who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, ‘God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer, I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get’. But the tax gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”*

The spirit of the Pharisee arises in us all, from time to time. The notion that “At least I’m not like that person who has done such obviously terrible things... at least I’m better than that, more acceptable to God”

But the Bible says, *“There is none righteous, no, not one” Romans, 3:10*

*“for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” Romans, 3:23*

*“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7, 1-5.*

We are often hypocritical, and just like the Pharisees, we are sometimes very quick to point out the wrong of others without examining ourselves to see if we are indeed deficient in similar ways.

•“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”

*“The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses, therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them”*

*“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your father, He who is in heaven” Matt 23, 2-9.*

• *The Seven Woes:*

*“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”*

The people of the day respected the Pharisees, and their practices influenced many.

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”*

*“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’ You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold?”*

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”*

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may be clean also”*

Our external religiosity may make us look righteous to others. But this is not what is important for the Lord.

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed sepulchers that on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones, decay and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness”*

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Consequently, you bear witness against yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets” Matt 23, 13-31*

We all have a strong tendency of hypocrisy toward God: focusing on “religious” observances and practices, alms-giving, etc. to make us feel righteous and cover up what’s in our heart which may not be faithful to God. Others observing us can be led astray by this behavior as well.

*“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.” Matt 6, 1-2*

*“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.” Matt 6, 5-6.*

*“Therefore do not be like them; for your father knows what you need, before you ask Him.” Matt 6, 8.*

*“The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.” 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, 1-9.*

There is one important thing that we must always consider: The Word of the Lord

*“Now as they were traveling along, He entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who moreover was listening to the Lord’s word, seated at His feet. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so*

*many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Luke 10, 38-42.*

- Pharisaism began well, but its perversion is a reminder that self-complacency and spiritual pride are temptations to which we are all susceptible.
- Legalism never turns people to God, or to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Legalism develops religiosity, which turns peoples hearts away from God, not toward God.
- Very often, “religious” people who do not have a relationship with the Lord but instead are used to the props, the structures, the regulations, the rules, and the environment become extremely accusative of those who just want to follow God’s word.