

Sadducee, Pharisee, or Follower of Christ?



As those who claim to be true followers of God, one of the worst things that could happen is to find out (on Judgment Day) that we were no different than the Sadducees or Pharisees who also believed they were true/legitimate followers of God. Why do I say that? Two reasons: 1) b/c according to John the Baptist, such individuals were destined for wrath (or hell) (Mat 3:7). 2) b/c according to Jesus we can be guilty of embracing their same damning beliefs and practices. IOW: We can become “Christian Sadducees and Pharisees” and as a result, experience the same eternal damnation as they did. Hence (then) why Jesus warns his disciples in (Mat 16:6-12) to “beware of the leaven” or “teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”. Mark 12:18-40 reveals what about each of these two groups caused them to be so despised by God. As such, it provides us a list of identity markers we need to make sure is not part of our Christian makeup:

1. The Marks of a Sadducee

1.1. They were Cherry-pickers: being selective regarding what portion of the Bible they listened/submitted to.

The Sadducees held only to the books of the Bible written by Moses (the Pentateuch) ignoring the rest as authoritative (Joshua – Malachi). Because they could not find evidence in the Pentateuch for the resurrection (the 1st explicit mention of resurrection is Dan 12:2), they denied its existence (**18a**). As such, the Sadducees are among the first cherry-pickers in a long line of similar heretics.

Examples of selective listening/submission today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

1.2. They were Skeptics: repeatedly questioning the Bible’s trustworthiness, accuracy, or consistency.

In the Sadducees’ minds, the Bible (taken as a whole or past the Pentateuch) was filled w/contradictions or contained impractical, unreasonable (even impossible) precepts/scenarios. This (then) is what we see the Sadducees attempting to do thru their use of Moses’ teaching on Levirate marriage (from Deu 25): to expose the conclusions of a whole Bible approach (which would include explicit teaching on the resurrection) as ridiculously unreasonable, impractical and impossible (**18b-23**). So then, though the Sadducees claimed to trust/follow God, they were true skeptics at heart.

Examples of such whole Bible distrust today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

1.3. They were Presumptuous: constantly acting like they knew what they didn’t know (24-25)

“Power of God” refers to the fact that at the time of the resurrection, God – by His omnipotent power, will preserve and place our souls into heavenly bodies that - like the bodies of angels, neither desire nor need the intimacy or companionship of a spouse. Jesus reveals this to be how God was going to resolve what seemed like an impossible dilemma. This also Jesus reveals to be another fatal flaw in the Sadducees character. Rather than entrusting the secret/unknown things to God (Deu 29:29), the Sadducees assumed that what must be true on earth, must follow in heaven/the resurrected life (i.e. we must be married in heaven just as we are here since we will most certainly desire it as we desire it now). As such they were presumptuous, acting like they knew what they did not – and by such behavior, deceiving themselves into thinking they were the ones w/the right/correct doctrine; the true followers of God.

Examples of sinful presumption today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

1.4. They were Blowhard-Hacks: attempting to take a bold position on certain doctrinal issues though their study-time and knowledge of the Bible (including the texts they used to support their position) was embarrassingly shoddy/deficient (in comparison) to the strong stance and confidence they exuded (26-27).

Notice, Jesus does not go outside of the Pentateuch to prove the resurrection. Rather, He uses (Exo 3:6) – part of the very books they claimed supported their position (“have you not read in the book of Moses?”). He beats them at their own game (or with their own stick). Why? Not only to make His point about (them) not knowing the Scriptures (24) – including the ones they claimed as their own (i.e. the Pentateuch), but also to expose the folly which was the true foundation of their great boldness. They were nothing more than blowhard-hacks.

Examples of bold biblical incompetency today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

2. The Marks of a Pharisee

2.1. They were Posers: hypocritically supporting what the Bible teaches in their doctrine but denying it in their practice (28-34).

Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees embraced the entirety of God's Word and (from a purely intellectual standpoint), were pretty sound in their understanding of its overall teaching – as demonstrated through their understanding of what constituted the greatest commands. Though there is no place in the Bible that calls any one command the “greatest” or most important; nor is there anywhere which lists these two commands together implying this to be the case, (like Jesus), the Pharisees' grasp of the Law as a whole allowed them to see that such was the case. In other words – they like Jesus, were able to see that everything commanded in the Bible (including the Ten commandments) could ultimately be summarized and placed under the laws of loving God and loving your neighbor. They could also see that such love for God included making sure that what a person believed about Him was orthodox. This is why Jesus begins His response w/v29 – “The most important is, ‘Hear O’ Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” – which as the Pharisee affirms in v32 to mean, “there is no one besides Him.” It is a statement which tells us that believing whatever we want to believe about God is not okay. He is not the sum of many gods - or thoughts about God. He exists (and is defined) according to one set of truths only. To know Him (and likewise love Him) therefore means to know Him according exactly what those truths are – and nothing else (or “no other”). The Pharisees got that as well. They also (surprisingly enough) understood that the most important aspect of the gospel; the piece that keeps God's gracious forgiveness extended to us, is observance/obedience to the Law (again, v 33; see also Psa 40:6-8, 51:13-19). So (then) in word, the Pharisees espoused sound doctrine and even the sound gospel message of Lord Before Savior (i.e. no sacrifice/forgiveness to those unwilling to submit in obedience). However, all of it was done w/complete hypocrisy. Based on what they lived/practiced, the Pharisees were lawless rebels. Hence why Jesus affirms his understanding as correct (i.e. his gospel understanding was correct, he knew what the Bible taught), while at the same time making it clear that he (himself) was still outside the kingdom walls (again, v34a = “not far” but not in either!). Notice also the response of the Pharisee (v34b = This included the Pharisee as well as anyone else like him. Why ask Him anything else (?) – since all it could do is further their exposure as absolute hypocrites – those who gave lip service to God's Law, or the appearance of being faithful, when in reality, they didn't live it at all). Jesus exposes such hypocrisy even further in (38-40) (see also Mat 23:1-7, 28). The reason (then) for such hypocrisy was the fact that what really captured their heart (i.e. what meant most to them) was not the approval or praise of God – but people. Something John's gospel also confirms about them (Joh 12:42-43). The Pharisees therefore were nothing more than posers. They could make the sale, but not the delivery (again Mat 23:3b-4).

Examples of orthodox hypocrisy today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

2.2. They were Deceivers: always acting like they didn't know what they did know (35-37; “scribe” = these particular ones were also Pharisees – Mat 22:34-37).

The reason we don't hear anything regarding the response of the Pharisees to Jesus' question is b/c there wasn't one. According to Matthew's account of the same event, “no one was able to answer Him a word”. Why? B/C they knew what He was driving at (and what they would now have to admit!). Whoever Messiah was – He was greater than David (since fathers don't call their sons “Lord”). More importantly (at least to this present encounter), is what that implied about His kingship. The only people kings called “Lord” were the priests – since they were the judges (and true rulers) of Israel (2Chr 19:4-20:19; Deu 17:8-20, 31:9¹). Even Jesus operated based on this theocratic understanding (e.g. Mat 8:1-4). Why (then) that ultimately became a “rub” for these Pharisees goes back to the term, “scribe”. In the words of E.P. Sanders, “the post-exilic biblical evidence uniformly points to the fact that the priests were scribes.” (*Judaism*, p.171; see also Ezr 8:1-2). What such evidence also points to is the Messianic expectation of the Jewish nation during the days of Jesus. Messiah/Christ w/b a Davidic king – but *not a priest*. As such, he would defer to the priests/high priest in all legal and doctrinal matters.² Putting all of that together reveals what exactly these Pharisee-priests (of our text) were not willing to admit (i.e. what Jesus just taught them about Messiah/Christ from Psa 110): that Messiah/Christ w/b both a king and a priest. As such, these “scribes” (or again priests) would no longer be the ones in authority. They would have to submit to Jesus (rather than Him submitting to them and their counsel). And for a bunch of guys who want everyone to call them ‘Rabbi’ and take the important seats among the people, that is the last thing they are going to admit! So (instead) they kept their mouths shut and acted like they didn't know- what they *now did* (know). They continued to play the part of the deceiver. Jesus (btw) had already condemned such deceitful activity in relation to both the Pharisees and Sadducees prior our encounter here (see Mat 16:1-3). This is why (also) no doubt, He refers to the Jewish leaders as liars/deceivers and children of Satan in (Joh 8:44-55). The Bible warns that denying to know - what we know to be true – i.e. claiming ignorance, is something God will judge us for (Pro 24:12).

Examples of this form of deceit today =

What defines the true follower of Christ =

(Conclusion): The key to living as true follower of Christ (versus a Sadducee or Pharisee) = BE DRIVEN (not motivated).

¹ Josephus makes mention of both Deu 17 and 31 in his writings, believing that both teach that “the king is to do nothing without the high priest” (*Antiquities* 4:24). Josephus also states that God had assigned the role of governing the nation of Israel in all matters “to the whole body of priests” (*Apion* 2:165).

² Expanding on this, there were those within the Jewish community who believed in two Messiahs: one a king, the other a priest. In either case, the king submitted to the authority of the priesthood. Here there was no argument, since God had indeed established Israel as a theocracy not an oligarchy (e.g. Dead Sea Scrolls: 4Qumran – Isaiah Peshar and Messianic Florilegium). Per the evidence found in the NT, it seems pretty clear the Jews had a hard time reconciling these two offices in to one person (e.g. Heb 7:11-17).