

Rediscovering the Pharisees Part 2



Imagine someone calling you a “Pharisee”. You would likely be offended by this association. It is understandable, but do you know why? Popular culture – especially Christian culture, has made “Pharisee” a derogatory term. Most people however – including Christians, don’t know very much about the Pharisees. And what they claim to know, is frequently wrong. The Pharisees deserve their derogatory status, but not for the reasons often heard. Discovering their true identity – that established in the pages of Scripture, will be the focus of this study.

1. RELEVANCE: Why study them?

Because understanding the Pharisees helps us to stay away from the teachings of Martin Luther, understand the teachings of Jesus, avoid becoming a member of the Dunning Kruger club—and ultimately, hell. To the point, understanding the Pharisees can help us to become better thinkers and discerners of truth – most importantly, the truth w/respect to salvation (e.g. we have embraced the right version of Christianity or are attending the right church, what we believe or live for will get us to heaven). The Pharisees were convinced they were teaching (or practicing) the right version of Judaism – that what they believed would get them and their followers to heaven. And the multitudes agreed. But they were self-deluded and dead wrong. According to Jesus, they were not on their way to heaven, but hell (Mat 23:13-15, 33). Their religion (though claiming to be true religion/true Judaism) was false religion. Their beliefs (or doctrine) was damning. An this affected their thinking. Though claiming to be experts in the Law, their beliefs (or religion) made them incredibly poor thinkers/interpreters of God’s Word. Which is yet another reason we should be excited about studying the Pharisees (or their beliefs). Through the discovery of their beliefs, we find answers to our own poor thinking as well as the reason so many (today) have embraced a false and damning version of Christianity. It is because our/their religion is no different than that of the Pharisees.

2. RELIGION: What were the main tenets/beliefs of the Pharisees?

2.1. Traditionalism

Giving human tradition (the teachings, doctrine, beliefs, practices, principles, policies, commands, laws, justice and religion established by mankind) more authority than God’s Word (the teachings, doctrine, beliefs, practices, principles, policies, commands, laws, justice and religion established by the writers of Scripture)¹.

2.1.1. The Pharisees were traditionalists. They possessed many traditions which they used to trump (or negate) the commands of God (Mat 15:1-9; Mar 7:1-5 “many other traditions that they observe”)

2.1.2. Embracing traditionalism made the Pharisees poor thinkers/poor interpreters of Scripture (2Pe 3:16):

2.1.2.1. it caused them to confuse and conflate the Scripture w/their tradition (Mat 12:1-5 “your disciples are doing what is not *lawful* on the Sabbath...Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” = The Pharisees’ tradition went beyond the Law’s prohibitions for the Sabbath. The confusion created by their traditionalism eventually caused them to conflate the two viewing them as synonymous. IOW: it clouded their view or blurred the line between what was personal preference and what was God’s will).

2.1.2.2. they became “blind” in relation to the Scriptures/spiritual issues/salvation (e.g. Mat 15:10-20; “*blind guides*” = Unable to discern spiritual truth or see what the Scriptures were teaching so as to point people in that direction; Joh 9:39-41 = The Pharisees were unable to recognize the saving gospel message being communicated by Jesus; See also Joh 7:14-19 “Jews”= Jewish religious leaders including the Pharisees - See Joh 1:19 and 3:1 also Fn on 5:10; “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will” versus “the one who speaks on his own authority” = As discussed, the Pharisees represented the latter [they used their authority/will/tradition to trump God’s authority/will]. As a result they did not “know” that Jesus – or His “teaching [was] from God” – i.e. their traditionalism [in this case, their tradition regarding the Sabbath – see v19b-24 w/Mat 12:9-14] caused them to miss Jesus as the Christ).

¹ Not all tradition is bad. Paul even praises and exhorts churches toward certain traditions (2Th 2:15, 3:6; 1Co 11:2). Where they become a problem, is when they are used to diminish, restrict or override God’s Word. To do this is what it means to give them “more authority”.

2.1.2. It is for these reasons that Paul warns the Colossians about traditionalism (Col 2:8) “takes you captive” = Tricks you into loving what is erroneous/false; “according to human tradition, according to the elementary spirits (principles) of this world = The second phrase is functioning exegetically. It is the principles (or perception) of the world that form the foundation of human tradition. As such, though it seems wise or profitable, it possesses no ability to improve our spiritual state/standing before God or over sin (2:20-23).

“Traditionalism is a powerful force perfectly calibrated to play on our emotions, please our senses and promote our personal preferences while at the same time convincing us that it will not only make us better Christians but that its doctrine stems from will of God Himself.” - Anonymous

2.1.3. Traditionalism is alive and well today and clouding the beliefs/practices of many claiming to be Christians/Christian churches:

2.1.3.1. What they consider to be taught in God’s Word/promote as Christian culture:

2.1.3.1.1. money is the root of all evil and loans are bad (1Ti 6:10 w/Ecc 10:19; Rom 13:8 w/Mat 25:14-30)

2.1.3.1.2. swear words/vulgar language are inherently sinful (Eph 5:4 w/3 w/Eze 23:17-21; 1Sa 20:30; 1Ki 18:27; Luk 13:32; Phi 3:2, 8; Mat 3:7, 23:33; Mat 16:23)

2.1.3.1.3. forgiveness means you don’t pursue justice/sue people (1Co 6:1-11 w/Exo 34:7)

2.1.3.1.4. God prefers that a home/family where the food is home-made or home-grown and maintenance on the property, house and cars is done by the family (1Th 4:11-12 w/2Th 3:6-15 w/Col 2:20-23 w/Heb 13:9)

2.1.3.1.5. God prefers that women stay at home and the children be home-schooled (Tit 2:5 w/1Ti 5:11-14/Dan 1:4 w/17).

2.1.3.2. The last three (2.1.3.1.4 – 2.1.3.1.6.) can be summed up under the titles of “homerism” or “little-house-on-the-prairie theology” (e.g. Doug Wilson “shanty” video [https://youtu.be/yIa_vKwEhM] = NOTICE how all the “homer” events presented in the video are wrapped in the garb of spiritual song. The message: this is what Christian culture looks like when its people are mature or truly living for the Lord; this is God’s preference; What it really is: propaganda pushing traditionalism).

2.1.3.3. How they view the role of the pastor (To be a fun/nice-guy w/a positive and encouraging message versus Col 1:28-29; 1Ti 1:3, 4:7 w/13-15, 6:20; 2Ti 2:3-4, 15, 22, 4:2; Tit 10-11)

2.1.3.4. What they consider to be the saving gospel (The Evangelical gospel is the gospel according to Martin Luther *not* the gospel according to Jesus)

2.1.3.5. How they carry out church discipline (Consider: 1) every pastor/church who claims to be biblical would condemn traditionalism and situational ethics, 2) everyone of those pastors/churches would also agree that masturbation is sexual immorality, 3) additionally, these same people would agree that the only penalty ever associated w/sexual immorality in the bible is capital in nature, 4) how many of these pastors/churches are excommunicating people guilty of masturbation? None. Which means whether they admit it or not, they are all guilty of traditionalism as well as situational ethics. Can a church be the right place [i.e. truly Christian] and practice situational ethics?).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE = Based on our discussion today, how much of your religion is steeped in traditionalism? To the degree that it is, is the degree to which you can expect your thinking to be diminished when it comes to those things in life which are the most important (i.e. there is direct correlation between a person’s wisdom and the false beliefs they possess/practice).