

Are You a Pharisee?

Introduction:

- 1) “You're a Pharisee!” That is the charge often hurled at anyone contending for strict conformity to God’s word, and since Jesus so often contended with and rebuked the Pharisees, no one wants to be associated with them.
- 2) But is it really legalism or Pharisaism to contend that God has given us a pattern and expects us to follow it closely?
- 3) I want to examine that idea in a lesson entitled, *Are You a Pharisee?* In this lesson we will do three things.
 - a) We will briefly look at the origin of the Pharisees.
 - b) Then we will look at Jesus and His attitude toward Scripture and obedience.
 - c) Lastly, we look at the actual points of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.

I. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND.

1. Not mentioned in the OT, meaning they developed during the inter-testamental period (years of silence).
2. Though every detail of their rise is not known, it is clear that they arose during a time when the Greek culture was seen as a threat to the holiness of the Jewish people.
3. The Pharisees arose in opposition to the prevailing culture of laxness toward the Law and Hasmonean compromise with the immorality of the Greeks. They were first known as the *Separatists* and the name *Pharisees* was derived from that.
4. They viewed failure to keep the Law of Moses as the root of all Israel’s problems.
 - a. Emphasized individual law-keeping more than corporate temple worship. **Acts 26:5; Phil. 3:5**
 - b. They built a “hedge” around the Law to guide men. **Mk. 7:1-5**
5. Why did this group, with seemingly noble origins and intentions, come under such harsh condemnation from Jesus? Why did they so strenuously oppose Him?
6. It was not what many think, but before we look at Jesus and the Pharisees let’s see some things about Jesus.

II. JESUS AND THE LAW (SCRIPTURE).

1. How did Jesus answer Satan’s temptations? **Mt. 4:4, 7, 10**
 - a. Quotes from **Dt.**, a relatively obscure book to most.
2. Law and Prophets to be fulfilled to the smallest detail. **Mt. 5:17f**
3. Not even a “least” commandment was to be broken. **Mt. 5:19**

4. When accused of wrongdoing, He went back to the text. **Mt. 12:2f, 5, 7**
 - a. He didn't contend that one could do "do as he pleased," but used the Scripture to justify the actions of His disciples.
5. When asked about divorce. **Mt. 19:3-6**
6. The Scripture cannot be broken. **Jn. 10:34-36**

III. JESUS AND OBEDIENCE.

1. The first words of His public preaching demanded repentance. **Mt. 4:17**
2. Not just "Lord, Lord," but hear and do. **Mt. 7:21-27; Lk. 6:46**
3. Not an either/or. **Mt. 23:23**
4. Hear and keep it. **Lk. 11:27f**
5. Abide in His word. **Jn. 8:31f, 51**
6. Demanded by love and friendship. **Jn. 14:15; 15:14; cf. 1 Jn. 5:3.**

IV. CONCLUSION.

1. Whatever the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, the Lord would not have objected to someone insisting that men obey God and/or keep His commandments, even to the smallest detail.

V. FIVE ERRORS OF THE PHARISEES.

1. Their focus had shifted to pleasing men, not God. **Mt. 6:1f, 5, 16; 23:5-7**
 - a. Carefully obeying or not, their focus was on the praise of men and not pleasing God.
 - b. That set up many of their other problems.
 - c. Though these general statements did not apply to every Pharisee, they do seem to have represented them as a whole.
2. Didn't always abide by their own understanding of God's laws. **Mt. 23:3**
 - a. They were not rebuked for strict obedience, but hypocrisy.
3. The external was emphasized over the internal. **Mt. 23:23-28**
 - a. Qualities that could not be measured with exactness were not emphasized.
 - b. Despite knowing that the two greatest commandments involved a heart of love. **Lk. 10:25-27**
4. Sometimes reduced laws to the bare minimum. **Mt. 5:21f, 27f, 31f**
 - a. Though hard on others (**Mt. 12:7; 23:4**), they found ways to lighten their own burdens. **Mt. 23:16-22; Mt. 15:1-9**
 - b. They were not being too strict—they were leaving off important things. **Mt. 23:23**

5. They were self-righteous.
 - a. The Pharisees saw little need for the grace of God—they seemed to expect the gratitude of God.
Lk. 18:9-14; 15:1-3, 25-32
 - b. Here is a danger point. The more careful we become in our lives, the greater the temptation to forget the grace of God. **Eph. 2:8f**
 - c. And even when no sin is involved, we are still unworthy. **Lk. 17:10**

Conclusion:

- 1) Are you a Pharisee? Am I?
- 2) Are we asking if we are sometimes more inconsistent than we should be? Do we ever lose some of our focus on God? Ever guilty of emphasizing some things to the neglect of others? Ever condemn others while excusing ourselves? Forget that God's grace is the key?
- 3) Most, if not all, have done at least some of these things at some point and we must be aware of these dangers and do all we can to avoid them, but that we struggle with these problems does not make us Pharisees.
 - a) As long as we recognize these as problems and try to overcome them.
- 4) Are we Pharisees? Is the question being asked because we have a stated commitment to strict obedience? Do we believe that God cares about more than an attitude?
- 5) Such is not Pharisaism, but discipleship. **Mt. 7:21-23; 28:18-20**
- 6) We want to be on guard against Pharisaical attitudes, but let's understand plainly that a commitment to doing the will of God is not Pharisaism.
- 7) Where do you stand with Jesus today?