

Phariseeism

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Matt. 23:

Phariseeism, a danger.

Phariseeism, legalism, and self-righteousness are different terms used to designate an earned salvation rather than salvation based on God's grace.

Not all Pharisees were like those mentioned in Matthew 23.

- Nicodemus. John 3:1-2, *“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”*
- John 19:38-40, *“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.”*

Paul had been a Pharisee, and he stood with them on certain matters against the Sadducees.

Acts 23:6, *“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”*

Leaven of the Pharisees.

Jesus warned against the leaven of the Pharisees.

Matt. 16:6, *“Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”*

He pronounced a series of woes on them. (Matt. 23).

What about Phariseeism today?

There are some who feel that if they can label someone a Pharisee, they are automatically excused from believing or doing those things which are taught by the “Pharisee.”

The Pharisees contended for certain things and opposed certain things, therefore people think they should not pay attention to these contentions.

However, when a truth of God is taught it should be observed regardless of who contends for it.

Note what Jesus said concerning the Pharisees when they expounded the law of Moses, but not their traditions:

Matt. 23:1-3, "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not."

When a Pharisee teaches truth one should stand, as it were, with the Pharisee on these matters, and in opposition to error on those matters.

Paul stood with the Pharisees on the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning angels, spirits, and resurrection.

Acts 23:6, "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."

Firmness of conviction is not Phariseeism

There are those who seem to think that a person is a proud Pharisee when he has certain convictions in his faith in Christ. Conviction to them is self-righteousness. They not only decry the keeping of the commandments of God, but they also say it is impossible to be certain about the commandments of God.

We are told by the Spirit to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.

1 Thess. 5:21, *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*

There are those who discredit a carefulness to do just what God has commanded by calling it Phariseeism. If this is Phariseeism, it is wrong to do what God commanded. To avoid Phariseeism in this sense, then, one must neglect God's will, and follow his or someone else's will.

But Jesus condemned making void the word of God in order that one might keep the commandments of men.

Matt. 15:8-9, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in

vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Therefore, there is something wrong with this definition of Phariseeism.

Some people point to the woe in Matt 23:23:

Matt. 23:23, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

He did not condemn their carefulness in tithing. They ought to have done this, he said. However, he did condemn them for leaving undone the weightier matters of the law. They were to do both.

Furthermore, they had added to the will of God the traditions of men. They held these traditions even above the will of God.

Mark 7:1-12, “Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother;”

The Jews had many things written by their elders that they followed even more closely than the words written by Moses. It was these traditions Jesus spoke of. It was this “law” the Pharisees were referring to.

Matthew covers this a little differently.

Matt. 15:11, 20, “*Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. ... These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*”

He was referring to the Pharisees were complaining about the dirtiness of their hands and the utensils they were using. This had no reference to anything taken internally. The other things that defile the body were covered elsewhere in the Bible. God has certainly covered many times in the Old and New Testaments the results of taking intoxicating wines. 1 Cor. 6:10 tells us that drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That certainly has a defiling effect.

The Pharisees had added the tradition of the elders to the Mosaic Law. It was these traditions Christ objected to. We are to keep the will of God.

One must take care lest he try to prove he is not a Pharisee by freeing himself from any or all rules and principles of God. If one does this he is trying to justify himself; for he is relying not upon what God has said, but upon his own opinions.

Under no law?

Is it Phariseeism to maintain that the Christian is under law in some sense? If law in no sense applies to a Christian, we are faced with the following conclusions:

There is not anything that a Christian should do and there is not anything that a Christian should refrain from doing.

But 1 John 3:4 says, “*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*”

If there is no law, there is no transgression of the law, and thus there is no sin. A Christian in this sense can bear false witness, steal, or commit adultery because there is no law.

If they have a law, it is a law against what they think Phariseeism is, which is then a contradiction, because then they have a law.

Grace, not law

Some quote Rom. 6:14, “*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*”

This was the Law of Moses. The Jews of that time understood what Paul was saying.

Does Paul mean that law in no sense applies to the Christian? He is talking about sin having dominion over us. If all we had was law, we would all be in sin because we all sin, and law cannot remove sin. Sin would have dominion over us and reign over us until death. It is the grace of God that releases sin's dominion over us. Grace is God-given; but this does not exclude us from living under His law of Grace. He also gave us His law. If we reject His law today, then we turn grace into a license to sin.

He did not say they could not sin, he said they should not sin.

- Rom. 6:16-18, *“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”*
- Rom. 6:23, *“... the wages of sin is death; ...”*

Law is in sound doctrine

The Bible is clear that law does apply to the Christian. We are to do the will of God in order to enter the kingdom.

Matt. 7:21-23, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

There are some who assume that they are being spiritual in decrying the idea of commandments being binding on Christians.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 14:37, *“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”*

There are commandments of God. We are to observe them.

Matt. 28:20, *“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

It is not a mark of spirituality to be indifferent to them.

Loving God is not unrelated to His commandments. John 14:15, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”*

What Phariseeism really is

Hypocrisy. Luke 12:1, “... Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

To be seen of men. Matt. 23:1-7, “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.”

The condition of the heart of the Pharisee was quite different from his external show.

Jesus said they were binding things on others that they didn’t even follow themselves; and much of what they bound was not from God.

Part of their problem was self-righteousness, instead of God’s righteousness.

There is a difference.

Rom. 10:1-3, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

When God has appointed works for man to do, they are of His righteousness, not man’s. Man must do them, but they are not his works, but God’s. Man is saved by walking in God’s appointed way. He is saved in doing the works of God, which is of His righteousness, because he proves his faith by doing the things commanded by God.

i.e. Baptism is not man’s righteousness, but God’s.

James 2:21-22, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”

The whole 2nd chapter of James teaches us that faith and works go hand in hand; because we are talking about the works and righteousness of God, and not of man.

- Matt. 23:23, “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*”
- Rom. 10:17, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”

Conclusion

Matt. 23:1-3, “*Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*”

Matt. 16:6, “*Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*”

