

The Pharisees Examined in the Light of Scripture

I. The PHARISEES were the most numerous and wealthy sect of the Jews. They derived their name from the Hebrew word *Pharash*, which signifies to set apart, or to separate, because they separated themselves from the rest of their countrymen, and professedly devoted themselves to peculiar strictness in religion. Their leading tenets were the following:—that the world was governed by fate, or by a fixed decree of God; that the souls of men were immortal, and were either eternally happy or miserable beyond the grave; that the dead would be raised; that there were angels, good and bad; that God was under obligation to bestow peculiar favour on the Jews; and that they were justified by the merits of Abraham, or by their own conformity to the law. They were proud, haughty, self-righteous, and held the common people in great disrespect, #John 7:49. They sought the offices of the state, and affected great dignity. They were ostentatious in their religious worship, praying in the corners of the streets, and seeking publicity in the bestowment of alms. They sought principally external cleanliness; and dealt much in ceremonial ablutions and washing.

Some of the laws of Moses they maintained very strictly. In addition to the written laws, they held to a multitude that they maintained had come down from Moses by tradition. These they felt themselves as much bound to observe as the written law. Under the influence of these laws, they washed themselves before meals with great scrupulousness; they fasted twice a week—on Thursday, when they supposed Moses ascended Mount Sinai, and on Monday, when he descended; they wore broad phylacteries, and enlarged the fringe or borders of their garments; they loved the chief rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues. They were in general a corrupt, hypocritical, office-seeking, haughty class of men. There are, however, some honorable exceptions recorded, #Ac 5:34. Perhaps, also, #Mark 15:43 Luke 2:25 23:51 John 19:38.” From Barnes Notes on the Whole Bible.

Acts 15:5 “But there rose up certain of the *sect of the Pharisees* which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 26:5 “Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most *straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*”

Philippians 3:5 “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; *as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*”

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.* 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the

multitude was divided. 8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*”

Luke 18:11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”

Matthew 23:1 “Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, 2 Saying, The scribes and *the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat:* 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: *for they say, and do not.* 4 *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.* 5 *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,* 6 *And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,* 7 *And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*”

The following is our Lord’s penetrating and withering analysis of the Pharisees from Matthew 23:13-33:

1. **They were obstructionists:** “But **woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*”
2. **They were materialists:** “14 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*”
3. **They were religionists:** “15 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*”
4. **They were compartmentalists:** “16 **Woe unto you**, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! 17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. 19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? 20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.”
5. **They were obscurantists:** “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. 24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”
6. **They were externalists:** “25 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full

- of extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.”
7. **They were hypocrites**: “27 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”
8. **They were persecutors and murderers**: “29 **Woe unto you**, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? 34 Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: 35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. 36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. 37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Note the language used by the Lord to describe them:

1. Hypocrites
2. Child of Hell
3. Blind Guides
4. Fools
5. Blind
6. Whited Sepulchers
7. Outwardly Righteous
8. Full of Hypocrisy
9. Full of Iniquity
10. Children of them that killed the prophets
11. Serpents
12. Generation of Vipers

Our Lord struck right at the root of their problem in Luke 18:9-14:

Luke 18:9 “And he spake this parable unto *certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*: 10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and *prayed thus with himself*, God, **I** thank thee, that **I** am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 **I** fast twice in the week, **I** give tithes of all that **I** possess. 13

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: *for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased;* and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

They were filled with hatred:

They hated the common people- John 7: 45 “Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? 46 The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. 47 Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? 49 But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.”

They hated Christ:

Matthew 12:14 “Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.”

Luke 6:11 “And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.”

John 11: 47 “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. 49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; 52 And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. 53 Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.”

They hated Christians:

Acts 26:11 “And I punished them oft in every synagoge, and compelled [them] to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted [them] even unto strange cities.”

Acts 7:54 “ When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”