

"Christian Pharisees"

Who were the Pharisees in the New Testament, and why should we pay attention to them? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Who were the Pharisees, and does Christianity have people like them? Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We strive each day to please God, but to do so we must distinguish what God says from what the traditions of men teach. We must fill our hearts with Scripture and know what God actually says not what some have dreamed up and attributed to God. We search for authentic Christianity and the Lord's way, not popular religion. We'd love to hear from you and we want to be a part of your life each week.

The Pharisees were often called a sect, but they were actually a fraternity of Jews who had decided to separate themselves from pagans and other Jews who were impure. As time passed their elders began adding to their own traditions. And they added them to the Law of Moses. You see they claimed that Moses was the source of their traditions and handed them down orally. Well, they were traditions that were added to the Scripture. As time passed their man-made traditions actually took greater precedence than the written word. They annulled the Scripture to honor their traditions. They didn't tolerate disagreement with their judgments, because they considered themselves as superior to others.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:19 to 20, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." We cannot ignore the written word to require human commandments and then judge others for not keeping our traditions. The Lord Jesus told people not to judge in Matthew 7, because the Pharisees were judging others on the basis of their man-made laws. They will be judged by how they judge others.

We offer this study, Christian Pharisees, free! And if you'd like a printed copy and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have programs and free materials on our website, www.searchtv.org. And you can also see us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song. We'll read from Luke 18:9 to 14, and examine the problems of Christian Pharisees.

Our reading today comes from Luke chapter 18 verses 9 to 14. And there Jesus describes the difference between people who exalt themselves and those who humble themselves before God.

And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

A good lesson for all of us to learn. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we are thankful that Your grace is so wondrous and so good to us. Father help us to look at ourselves and see the sin in our lives. Help us to be humble and confess and to repent of the things that we have done wrong. And Father we pray that You will bless the reading of His word. In Jesus name, Amen.

Jesus and His disciples did not follow the Pharisee ritual of washing their hands before they ate. Mark 7:2 to 5 says the Pharisees "had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" Actually they were accusing Jesus and His disciples of being sinners!

Well, centuries before Jesus, Jewish teachers of the Law sought to keep the Law. Their deep respect for Scripture seems commendable, but they built a hedge around the commandments of the Law by binding rules and customs upon the people. Now these human traditions were regarded just as sacred as the written Law of Moses. The Pharisees taught Moses received the "written law" and then he also received another law, which he didn't write down. And he was to deliver an "oral law" to the elders of the congregation. Well, there's no evidence this "oral law" came from Moses.

This oral law, they maintained, was the only authorized interpretation of the written law according to them. The oral law explained the written Law, according to them. These traditions or interpretations in this oral law were forced upon the people, the common people, and the punishment for violating them was as severe as the punishment for the violation of "the written word." The Pharisees became authorities among the Jews, even though they couldn't prove their traditions came from Moses.

So when the Pharisees accused Jesus and His disciples of eating with impure hands, the Lord Jesus felt the need to answer them. He said to them in Matthew 15 verses 3 to 9, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'honor your father and mother,' and, 'he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God," he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (then Jesus said) You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' "

The Pharisees were separatists and they distinguished their fraternity from the common people. They relied on keeping the commandments of men to show their purity and their religious superiority over the rest of the Jews. The source of their traditions was in man not God. They presumed their human traditions made them more pure than others. And they made these human traditions necessary to keep. You see the Pharisees were convinced that the human traditions of the elders allowed them to transgress and invalidate the word of God!

You might recall the Pharisees opposed the Lord Jesus and anyone who followed Him. John 9:22 says that some of the common people were afraid of the Jews, at the advice of the Pharisees, "for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him (that is Jesus) to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue." John 12:42 to 43 shows that the power that the Pharisees had. It says, "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not

confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”

Though the Pharisees were powerful in the first century and judged others, they offered false hope. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 15 verses 13 to 14, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” God doesn’t bind laws that He didn’t make, but will uproot human traditions, so the faithful shouldn’t follow a blind guide or follow their traditions. Blind guides lead their followers to fall into a pit. The Lord Jesus warned the disciples in Matthew 16:6, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Well they were wondering what do you mean and He explained in verse 12 “the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Now Paul, who once was a Pharisee, exposed their false hope in Romans 10 verses 2 to 3. He said, “For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.” Oh he found that there was something better than self-righteousness and legalism.

He said in Philippians 3:7 to 9, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

In Matthew 23, the Lord Jesus repeatedly called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites because they paid attention to the outward appearance and neglected the weightier matters of the Law. You know what, I find this same fault with people today. Among those who call themselves Christians are religious groups that have councils made up of men and possess creeds written by men. And these councils and creeds bind their human doctrines and regulations on their religious groups. And many of these doctrines and practices are never imagined in Scripture. Sadly, the words of the leaders became more important than the words found in the New Testament.

Let’s look at some human traditions. First, some people loudly proclaim that we’re saved by faith alone. People often quote John 3:16 as if it told all and was the end of the matter about how we’re saved. And that we’re saved by faith alone. Now I treasure John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Oh I believe this verse, but I also know that there are many things it doesn’t teach.

It doesn’t show the necessity of our love for God, which is the first and great commandment. It says nothing about our need to repent, and repentance is absolutely essential to be right with God. It says nothing about baptism; but unless a person is born of water and the Spirit (that is baptism), he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3 and verse 5). It speaks of faith, John 3:16 does, but not of obedience. John 3:36 in the New American Standard Bible says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Second, people say that, “All you have to do is just say this little sinner’s prayer to be saved.” Peter didn’t say this when he preached the first gospel sermon to the guilty souls at Pentecost. He said in Acts 2:38 to 40, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” And with many other

words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" Now no one ever heard about the sinner's prayer until the last century. Did you know that? It's become a popular human tradition, but it has no foundation in the written word of God, the Scripture.

Third, some say that, "Baptism is a work, and you can't be saved by works!" Well when they say such things, they often miss the point about baptism. It is true that one cannot be saved by trying to earn one's salvation. Ephesians 2 and verse 8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." It's also true that one cannot be saved by the works of the Old Testament Law. Galatians 2:16 says, "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law (that is the Law of Moses) but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Well now, baptism is neither a meritorious work nor a work of the Law. Baptism is actually a work of God rather than men. Think with me about the command to be baptized. It's a passive imperative. The command of baptism in Acts 2:38 urges every one of those present to be baptized, that is, to allow themselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. We don't baptize ourselves; someone else immerses us in the water.

And in the same way God is the One acting upon us spiritually in baptism. He saves us in baptism (1 Peter 3:21); He buries and raises us with Christ in baptism (Colossians 2:12); He forgives our sins in baptism (Colossians 2:13); He adds us to His people in baptism (Acts 2 and verse 41); He makes us His child in baptism (Galatians 3:26 to 7); He washes away our sins in baptism (Acts 22:16); He causes us to be born again in baptism (John 3:5); and He frees us from sin in baptism (Romans 6 verses 6 to 7). So God is the worker when it comes to baptism, not us. To be baptized means we allow God to save us as His gift. We did nothing to earn it, but we must be willing to receive His gift.

Fourth, some teach once a person is saved, he can never be lost. But 2 Peter 2:20 to 21 says, "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." Galatians 5 and verse 4 describes people who have fallen from grace.

Hebrews 3:12 and 13 says Christians, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Oh we need to take warning seriously. We can lose our souls.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we're thankful for Your word that corrects the errors that men teach in their human traditions. And Father help us always to turn to You for the truth. In Jesus name, Amen.

If there are blind guides today and we follow them, what will happen to us? We must ask, "Is this teaching from God or man? Is this practice from God or man?" If it comes from man, can you trust it? If it's a doctrine never taught in Scripture but first taught in the sixteenth century or the twentieth century, can you trust it? Do you know that there was no such thing as a denomination until the sixteenth century? Some people say they are non-denominational, but they still teach doctrines and practice things not found in Scripture. They still follow human traditions. We must leave them alone.

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 15:13, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up."

Have you placed your hope in a doctrine or practice planted by men but not God? Did someone tell you that you were forgiven before you were baptized? Read Acts 22:16 and Romans 6:3 to 7. Baptism is when our sins are washed away and when we're freed from sin. Were you sprinkled for baptism? Then you were not buried in baptism. The word "baptism" in the original language refers to an immersion not sprinkling. Did someone tell you once you're saved, you're always saved? Remember Hebrews 10:26 and 7 and 2 Peter 2:20 to 21. One can fall from grace.

Rather than follow human traditions, let's do what we know is true from God's word! Our souls are purified by our obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22). Believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins and turn to righteous, confess Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Now that is from the first gospel sermon presented by Peter as the Spirit gave him utterance. So let's follow the truth!

We hope our study on, Christian Pharisees, has caused you to want to love God with all your souls and to do what's right. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy, send your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. There's a schedule of our programs, a map of churches in your area at www.searchtv.org. SEARCH is also on YouTube! So subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry" and like the programs. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, we're not asking for money. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Show God your love by worshiping at church. You need a church family. If you can attend, don't neglect worshiping at church. And there's one probably near you and we'd like to help you find one. Well as always, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.