

# Modern Day Phariseeism

When a church teaches that it is impossible to keep the Law of God, or that even the best works of the saints, done with the Holy Spirit's grace, are utterly abhorrent in God's sight, then they open the door wide for Phariseeism. For if God's standard cannot be kept, then you must erect another (lower) standard. And that is the heart of Phariseeism; that is what makes excuses for sin, and allows sin's bondage to be perpetuated. When that is the case, then you certainly will have many people struggling in bondage and sin in the church.

Phariseeism is not exclusive to any church, it is a part of sinful human nature. The best remedy for it is to lift up the Law of God, and apply it to the inmost thoughts and imaginations of the heart, as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount. And then tell the people that their righteousness must exceed what is commonly accepted as "Christian experience" otherwise they will not be part of Christ's kingdom.

And then they must be taught how to be delivered from sin's power. You will have to search quite a bit for that clear teaching, for the topics of the new birth and cleansing from sin are not well understood in most churches. I speak now from my own experience.

The power of Christ's gospel is seen in that it can make a saint out of the weakest human. Look who Christ healed: some of the weakest and most desperate sick ones. That is an illustration of the power and effectiveness of His gospel. It does not take years and years of hard effort to be delivered from pride, hatred, lust, bigotry, or stubbornness. Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light.

*Then rejoice in this present salvation,  
Thanks to God for the victory within,  
For the weakest believer in Jesus  
Can now live every day without sin.*

There seems to be an assumption in our religious world today, that the Pharisee is a stickler for the law of God. This, however, was not the case. The Pharisees pretended to be zealous for God's law, but actually they had invented many traditions which were born out of their attempts to interpret that Law in a way that would allow them to keep their selfishness. Because they did not have the love of God in their hearts, their interpretations were faulty, and the laws that they made interfered with the real Law of God.

Phariseeism degraded the Law, and cast contempt on it, because their little laws, which were supposed to be based on the Law of God, made the real Law seem like an intolerable burden. Whenever today the Law of God is presented as an intolerable burden, you may surely know that Phariseeism is at work.

But for Jesus the Law was not an intolerable burden, nor did He present it that way. It is only when the Law of God is seen clearly, that sin is seen clearly, and can be confessed and removed. It is sin that makes life a burden, and the removal of sin makes the burden light. The Law of God is what reveals sin, so it is part of the solution in making the burden light.

And when the burden of sin is removed, and the Law is placed in the heart, obedience becomes natural, desirable, and satisfying.

The Pharisees were in no sense of the word "Law keepers." They only pretended to be. It is not the Law of God that makes Pharisees, but trying to mix sin with religion, or trying to use religion as a cloak for sin. As long as sin remains in the heart, there is a tyrant on the throne. Mix that with religion, and you have harsh and unjust judgment of others, condemn-

ing of the innocent and clearing of the guilty.

The Pharisees put their interpretations above the Law, and judged those who would not subscribe to those interpretations. By their standard, Jesus, the spotless Son of God, was deemed the worst of sinners, a dangerous man, and a rebel.

The false humility that is in the church today is Pharisaism through and through. It pretends to be like the publican, saying,

“Oh I am such a sinner! God be merciful to me a sinner!”

But when you tell them that God wants to be merciful by freeing them from the old carnal mind, then the Pharisee (who felt he did not need anything more) comes out:

“Oh no, I don't believe that...Oh no we can't be free, we will always be sinners. Christ will just cover us up with his own record in the judgment!”

That kind of response is really saying:

“I don't need Christ's message” “I am fine” “I am rich and increased with goods” “I belong to the true church” “I am safe and secure” “I keep the sabbath and pay my tithe”, etc. etc.

The publican felt his great need, and grasped hold of the deliverance that Christ offered in the gospel. The Pharisee thought he already had it, and so thanked God for what he thought he already had...but in fact did not have. The Pharisee was satisfied with the righteousness he already had.

How can we know if we have the real righteousness or the false Pharisaic kind?

### **1 John 3**

<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no man deceive you: he that does righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.

The real righteousness delivers us from the enslaving power of sin, and makes us truly Christ-like within. It is something that education, training, and culture cannot pro-

duce.

The religion of the Pharisee was a very popular religion. Most of the Jews in Jesus' day chose it over Jesus' religion. There was one simple reason why this was so: you could keep your sin and (supposedly) have God also.

The Pharisees would have welcomed the rich young ruler into their church, but Jesus told him he had to sell all before he could follow Christ. To this young ruler, the Pharisee's religion would have seemed like the more merciful way, and a much lighter burden. Instead of sending him away sad, the Pharisees would have made him glad by welcoming him in.

This highlights the important difference between true religion and Phariseeism: with Phariseeism, the "lighter burden" is that you don't have to give up sin. It's nice that way, no life-death struggle against a corrupt heart and a guilty conscience, no casting down of all the idols. Just avoid some of the grosser sins, give up a few outward pleasures, do a few religious exercises, and you're good to go. You also have the advantage of belonging to a large, popular group, who will not be persecuted.

But with true religion, the lighter burden is the freedom from sin. It costs a struggle and sacrifice, but in the end there is a peace in the soul that cannot be gotten any other way. The disadvantage is that you will definitely be judged as a dangerous person by the Pharisee religion, your sanity will be questioned, your views will be criticized, and you will eventually suffer other forms of persecution.

Those consequences may seem like a burden to the flesh, but they will only draw you closer to Christ. And with His smile of approval, you will need nothing more.