

MODERN DAY PHARISEEISM

The Actor of Spirituality

“Ye are of your **FATHER THE DEVIL**, and the lust of your father ye will do.” John 8:44

“...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.” Matt. 23:15

“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Psalms 14:2-3

By Pastor Del Wray

I make no apology for the way I write and characterize the false pharisaical attitudes found in our churches and in our Baptist ranks today as is true of every period in God’s dealings with man and human nature. If you love God’s Word, you ought to have a genuine righteous indignation and hatred for what God hates.

“Through thy precepts I get understanding: **therefore I hate every false way.**” Ps. 119:104

“Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; **and I hate every false way.**” Ps. 119:124

Are we on the same plain, on the same page or do you think it is wrong to attack another’s religion? Is this your case, or has the fear of man kept you in a spiritual stronghold? Now that you’ve noticed the negative aspects of much of God’s Word. If you love that which is “pure” God’s Word, you will “**...Abhor that which is evil...**” Rom. 12:9. Sadly, the majority of Christians refuse to accept the duality of God majoring on his positive side and neglecting His negative. Right on His love and wrong on His hatred! God is love but He is also a God of hatred. Man’s failure to distinguish between the two opens him up to all kinds of Phariseeism!

The “act” or “show” of spirituality is Phariseeism. A Pharisee is an actor, one who goes through life acting out the Christians life. He well could be the super-spiritual Christian demonstrating his religious practice or the one practically performing his religious commitments or duties. It’s that person who looks just like a Christian, sounds like a Christian, has all the right friends, talks the talk, walks the walk, always carrying his KJB and letting you know how strong his belief in it is, shouts the loudest, preaches how great the “love of God” is wanting you to know he is a King James Bible authority, prompt in every service, giving liberally to those in need, tithing and active in all the programs of the church. The religious sect known as the Pharisee’s no longer exist as it did when Christ was here on earth but its philosophy, way of life, views and attitude is more apparent than ever. Jesus in the strongest terms warned against this way of thinking in Matthew 23.

“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,” Matt. 23:13.

“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity,” Matt. 23:28.

It was the pharisaical attitude that crucified Jesus Christ and had the Apostles martyred. The Apostle Paul struggled with Phariseeism. Phariseeism, as I am defining it in this context, signifies fixation with external religious practices and confidence in one's own performance; such fixation replaces authentic confidence in God and trust in His Word as the basis for one's salvation and the more abundant life walking with Jesus Christ. I remember God telling me when just a teenage that He would never leave me or forsake me, promising to be with me in life and even in death waiting to carry me over home. And what a relationship we have had! How foolish to go through life with the wrong views and the wrong understanding and miss out on a personal friendship with Jesus? They told me, when a kid, I would never amount to anything for God, and as I look back over the years I must admit they were right. Jesus made all the difference though, because the relationship that was formed between He and I made an “ordinary boy's life turned into an extraordinary life for God.” They don't know the half of it, I wish they only knew! Back to my purpose for this treaty, human nature wicked as it is has never changed and it is deceptive as ever. We are more apt to let ourselves be deceived than to deceive another.

Many of you remember the day George Wallace, the Governor of Alabama was shot he was a candidate for the president of the US. Unfortunately he wound up spending the rest of his life in a wheel chair. Incredible life for the man who stood at the entrance of the University of Alabama when the Federal Government was forcing integration on the all white colleges in America. Wallace's last words were, “segregation today, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever.” The irony of the shooting was the man in the crowd that shot him was dressed as one of his supporters. He was shouting as if they were friends and shot him at point blank range. Far worse than George Wallace's shooting is the murder of innocent souls by those exhibiting the pharisaical attitude and its lifestyle? The Devil will do anything to keep a soul from coming to Christ. The Devil uses all religions to keep souls from recognizing their true condition “lost, helpless and hopeless.” without a relationship with Jesus Christ. “...we shall be saved by His life.” It is the relationship that makes all the difference not the practical side of the Christian's experiences.

In Paul's day, certain religious leaders were getting inside the hearts and minds of Christians and getting them to move away from relational trust in Christ to confidence in the flesh. These religious leaders were seeking to convince Gentile Christians that faith plus circumcision equals salvation. For Paul, these religious leaders' demand that Gentile Christians be circumcised signified the mutilation of relational trust. We find Paul discussing this problem and providing a response in Philippians 3:1-21. I doubt many Gentile Christians today are debating whether or not to be circumcised to make sure they are saved. How about those who demand baptism? However, we often struggle with a more subtle form of performance-based spirituality expressed through a certain kind of Christian work ethic. I wonder what Paul would have made of those

attempts to assure ourselves of our salvation and adequacy as Christians through our spiritual performances and forms of religious proficiency or duties?

Performance-based spirituality is nothing new. “Faith plus circumcision” is simply an old form of it. The age-old problem of performance and capacity-based spirituality vs. relational spirituality is alive and well. Forms of performance or capacity-based spirituality are more subtle today, though they are always relatively easy to measure. Too often our approach to spiritual formation is a series of “cut and paste” activities. We start with a “sanitized” view of the gospel and then we attempt to “match” our living to that. This ignores the depth and complexity of life and breeds a static, performance-oriented spirituality of having all your “ducks in a row.” Performance-based spirituality often manifests itself in discussions of strong Christian leaders. For all his strength in Christ, Paul was weak, intentionally so, as we find in 1 Corinthians 2:2; 11-12. Paul did not succumb to the attempt to find his confidence in the power of his personality and strength as a leader. A preacher friend wrote this way, “Mind you, I have always secretly desired to be a “strong man;” but the longer I look at scripture, I just don’t see it. We don’t see the kingdom going forward on the coattails of “Great Men,” but on the bloody despised backs of men like Paul, who was a weak abominable person.”

Certainly, Paul could have played the game of performance-based spirituality. After all, he had reason for unparalleled confidence in the flesh. Consider what he writes in his critique of Christian Phariseism:

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 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; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,” Philippians 3:1-8

Though Paul could have boasted in his flesh, we find in verse seven and following that he places his confidence in Christ. After all, those who trust in Christ are circumcised of heart. They are the true circumcision, according to Paul:

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Philippians 3:3,

This was no academic debate for Paul. One needs to keep in mind that the leaders Paul is challenging here were moving about in churches. They were not outsiders. In fact, they were master performers inside church walls. I need to be on guard that I am not someone who is guilty of advocating forms of religion that involve boasting in the flesh and that inspired Paul’s cutting

critique. We all need to be on guard against boasting in our spiritual performances rather than Christ.

So, how shall we proceed? Shall it be from inability to ability to expertise? No, but by considering everything a loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. It involves discounting a righteousness that comes from boasting in this or that law and counting on a righteousness that comes through relational trust in Christ. Such trust involves forgetting what lies behind us by way of our performance and pressing forward in Christ in view of his performance on our behalf Philippians 3:7-14.

In place of proceeding from inability to ability to expertise, we need to proceed by way of responding to Christ's initiative and provision of His life and repenting and daily being renewed. As Oliver B Green wrote, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" Matt. 4:17, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance" Such repentance does not mean less work, but more work, the work of faith. The circumcised of heart will not fall back and coast; rather, they will run hard to the finish line to take hold of the one who has taken hold of them Philippians 3:12-14. They will work harder than anyone, yet without boasting in themselves. After all, as Jesus told another Pharisee, those who are forgiven much love much and those which are forgiven little love little Luke 7:47. Or as that former Pharisee Paul wrote, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it was I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed" 1 Cor. 15:8-11.

How confident in Christ's love are we who confess Christ? What are ways that we struggle with performance-based spirituality today in your estimation? What recommendations might you have to move us from placing confidence in our performance to placing confidence in Christ's performance of the faith on our behalf? How might we encourage one another in view of Christ's love to live out the faith so that God's grace toward us is not in vain but bears relational fruit? Jesus did not only die on the cross because He loved us, He died because of His hatred for sin and for the unrepentant sinner's pharisaical attitude of rejection. "It's hard to believe that someone would die in the place of a good man, but Christ went the extra mile and died for the ungodly. And that is exactly the point of God's love. That sin and ungodliness were so repulsive to God. That He would rather die than let us keep living like that. That Hell was so horrible that He rather die than let us go there" Romans 5:6-10.

"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." Matt. 23:12

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Matt. 23:33