

PHARISEEISM

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

Matt. 23:33

By Pastor Del Wray

Throughout the Bible there are many verses that warn the believer that things are not what they appear. As a matter of fact when a Christian looks at the things in the world and in particular in the church he should notice that they are almost always the exact opposite of what they may appear to be. The lost person will ignore these facts and live as if he has never been warned. While for the most part the believer to, knowing better, refuses to see things as God would have and continues to stumble around in a make believe existence in the church, blind completely, to the will of God for the church and for themselves, judging by appearance and not by “every Word of God.” 1 Sam. 16:7 says, *“For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance but the Lord looketh on the heart.”* Right here the spirit of “Phariseeism” is in control of much that’s going on in many of a believer’s heart and steals from him the joy of being in a real personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I like to call it this way, “Most people have enough religion to bug them and not enough to bless them.” Enough of that, I must stick to the point. Phariseeism, what is it and how is it distinguished?

What is it? How is it recognized in the Church?

In simple terms, it’s this. In the first century AD, the time when Jesus lived and died, and the Christian church came into existence, there were actually two sects or two religions. There was the Church the one that was founded by Jesus Christ beginning with the Apostles, and grew out of the life, death, burial, resurrection and teachings of Jesus Christ. It was made up of a regenerated membership. And then there’s the one that arranged for the judicial execution of Jesus Christ on the cross. This second religious group was made up probably of a mixed membership. Jesus used words like sheep and goats, wheat and tares good and bad fish so on. The first one is the Christian church; perhaps we could say the “true church.” The second I often refer to is the Pharisee assembly. Why do I call it that?

That’s easy; Church just means a called out Assembly of God’s people, in the Christian sense. But in day-to-day life it obviously gets used for those who really are God’s people, as well as for those who think they are God’s people, call themselves God’s people, and yet aren’t, not really. In the first century, these latter were the Pharisees, as that was the largest single religious group around at the time.

Let’s be clear here to avoid confusion! I’m looking at this thing not in terms of Christianity as a new movement that started around 33 AD and continued on from there. I’m looking at it in terms of God’s active intervention in the affairs of man which goes right back to the start of recorded history, and presumably even before, but it’s not written down continuing through the life and death of Jesus, and onwards into the era of the church as we call it today. We know the church as we know it today did not exist during previous dispensations but in the mind of God we can be

sure it did. If I may for the sake of clarification use the term assembly in God's dealings with man from his origin looking at it from God's perspective, perhaps we could call it the assembly before "BC" and the "AD" assembly, two variations on the same theme. Of course we know there was no church before Christ first coming. Not as we who rightly divide the Word of God know it. God dealt primarily in the Old Testament with His earthly people the Jew. Still the Church was in view.

The actual, historical, Pharisees were only around for a couple of hundred years, say 200 BC to around 100 AD. But, what is it about their movement, their philosophy? What about the spirit that motivated them, "Phariseism" in a broader sense? Jesus was pretty clear on this,

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar, Matthew 23: 29-31 and 34-38.

These words are taken from Jesus' denunciation against the Pharisees, the best-known version of which is recorded in Matthew's gospel. You ask what the point is. Simply this! The Pharisees, meaning those who actually called themselves by that name, lived for a couple of hundred years round about the time of Jesus. Then the name died out. But the "principle" is an ongoing, permanent one. It recurs in every generation, in every period of history.

It was there to kill Abel, Jesus tells us. It was there to kill Zechariah, about 750 BC. It runs through the whole of history, and it's here today, in new guises, posing the same threat that it always did. We need to understand it, recognize it and deal with it, as it was then and as it is now. It is this group that would if permitted crucify Jesus Christ again when He returns, except this time He comes in the clouds for the rapture or calling out at the first advent and seven years later at the second advent in Judgment.

We find two groups, two religions if you like. Both sincere, committed, self-sacrificing. Preaching the truth as they understood it. Both were trying to serve God the best way they knew how just as they are today. And yet, they are diametrically opposite to one another in almost every respect. They each have different priorities, different values. And both were then and still are today at total enmity with the other.

WHO WERE THEY AND WHO ARE THEY TODAY?

One group, were zealous for their faith, in the house of God regularly without fail, every Sabbath. They are fasting, tithing and praying shamefully, setting an example to the others. Surely God would commend their zeal and commitment! But did He? NO! Jesus criticized them constantly, fought them tooth and nail. They were "strong on religion, but weak on relationship."

Who were they? These were the scribes, and the Pharisees. The other group didn't fast. They didn't tithe, as far as we know. A little bit casual. And they are a bit sporadic about the Sabbath and that sort of stuff. What did God make of them? "Fear not little flock, for it is my Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," so said Jesus.

These were weak on religion, but strong on relationship. Who were they? These were the disciples and followers of Jesus Christ.

John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

Punctual, clear as day, Jesus words are. A good example was Paul the Apostle after he was saved. Let's look at his life before he was saved and then after he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Before Paul's conversion, his passion as a Pharisee was ritualism especially when it came to cleanliness, he had a Pharisaical fanaticism for religious cleanliness in his day. Jesus mocked this behavior as an attempt used to undermine "**the commandment of God.**"

"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 you do." Mark 7:8.

A much more destructive fanaticism got a hold of Paul's heart regarding those Jews, who believed Jesus rose from the dead and was the prophet of whom Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18: 15-19. Paul was given authority by the chief priest to imprison, torture, and kill fellow Jews who fell in with the sect of Nazarenes, the Jews that were getting saved in his day. This way of dealing with perceived apostate, believers became the practice of the Roman Church and the followers of Mohammed. Paul was devoted to his task of hunting down Jewish believers not only in Jerusalem but everywhere he could find them Acts 26:11. Like a Mafia enforcer, he would wash his hands in their blood as he carried out the contracts of his bosses who hated those who had converted to following Jesus. This horrendous period in Paul's life went a long way in helping him become the fanatic that he was for Jesus Christ. He strove to keep himself from blood guiltiness by warning all to repent and believe the gospel Acts 17:30. My attempt to picture a Pharisee may seem a bit strong here but its practices goes on in many a simpler fashion through-out Christianity today.

Today, is it any different? More to the point, could it ever be any different? To put it more severely, HAS HUMAN NATURE CHANGED SINCE THE TIME OF JESUS? Can the answers to these questions be anything other than No, No, and No?

That's why Phariseeism is so evil and should not be present in our lives. If we are not very careful we could be found having such and evil attitude. Human nature has not changed and we are capable of Pharisaical living. Be WARNED!

God's people are strong on their relationship with Jesus Christ and weak on religious practice. It is "**Jesus in you the hope of glory.**" Do we possess in our lives the Pharisee's attitude which is weak on relationship and strong on its practice? As you can see it is just the opposite. We should be careful of our emphasis! Either we're seeing it, the Pharisaical attitude in our lives or we're

missing it altogether! Human nature is unchanging! And if we want to have the complete truth of God's Word for our day, we need to find it again, identify it, and react accordingly. The Pharisaical life is easily detectable to those who are in a real life relationship with the Son of God, Jesus my friend. Any of my Christian friends can testify to that. Do I hear a hearty amen? The game changer is continually pleading the blood over our own lives guarding ourselves from this devilish attitude. Is your relationship with Jesus strong and weak on practice? Food for thought, brothers!

Phariseeism permeates our churches!