

SCRIBES, PHARISEES, SADDUCEES AND JESUS

Jesus had more trouble with this religious crowd of scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees than He had with the Roman government or Palestinian people. The strongest language Jesus ever used to denounce any people was against this same crowd; scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. Who were they? Why did Jesus condemn them? What lesson is there for us today?

The scribes were, as their name implies, the writers. They were supposed to be copiers of the laws, because there were no printing presses to publish them. But the scribes often injected their own interpretation into their copying instead of duplicating what was already written, thus, little by little, the laws could hardly be recognized from the originals. If they had been only printers or publishers, they could have been fired or sued or not hired again, but they were also the lawyers.

A school for scribes was started by Ezra way back 450 years before Christ Ezra 7:6-10. While Ezra had prepared his heart to know God's laws and teach them to others, during Israel's captivity, some scribes of different persuasions began to modify the law they were supposed to codify. The text had become void by their distorted interpretative teaching.

The Gospel tells us how certain scribes began to find fault with Jesus and His disciples. They asked the Lord why His followers did not keep the ceremonies of the elders, and Jesus answered them with a reference from Isaiah that the people honor the Lord with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. Laying aside God's written laws, they now laid down their own rules, their own legislative assembly. The scribes rejected the commandments and substituted their own thinking, "making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition," as Jesus said Mark 7:1, 5-9, 13.

Another time the scribes "caught" Jesus healing a man of a withered hand on a Sabbath, rest or cessation day. Jesus asked these lawyers; "Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" The scribes were so incensed that they plotted what to do to Jesus for healing a man and rejecting their concept of Sabbath-

keeping Luke 6:6-11.

Again a lawyer or scribe came to Jesus to tempt Him or trick Him Luke 10:25-37. The result was Jesus recited the story of the Good Samaritan and the need to do good to one's neighbor or anyone in need of help.

The scribes, like some lawyers and judges today, interpret God's laws or the common law of the Anglo-Saxon people according to their own ideas and social or political judgment. Thus we have rulings and legislation today that is totally different from the legal base of our founding fathers and Biblical heritage. No wonder that God's people get upset when the Supreme Court rules that Bible reading and prayer in public schools is illegal because we use God's name reverently, but it is merely a practice of freedom of speech to use God's name profanely in pornography and obscenity! The Supreme Court, made up of scribes who change laws by their judgments, has revised ancient standards by their new rulings, rather than in terms of God's established statutes and judgments. What is worse is that we have clergymen, bishops and denominational leaders who support these modifications by the secular courts rather than upholding the written Word of the Lord.

The Pharisees' name means "separated ones" who held themselves to be above the common people. They were the most powerful sect among the Jews in Jesus' day, although there were only about 6,000 of them under Herod. The Pharisees were probably descended from a strict group of Assideans from the time of the Maccabees, between the times of the Old and New Testaments.

The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul and the after-life, but like the scribes, they held to their oral traditions from the laws of Moses to be more valid than the written record. Pharisaic laws had the same force as Mosaic law but the Sadducees rejected them. To the Pharisees, the letter of the law was more vital than the spirit. There was no mercy in their injustice. They majored in trivial things while neglecting the more vital things.

The twenty-third chapter of Matthew records Jesus' strong accusations and denunciations against these legal minds of the

scribes and Pharisees who were heartless and self-righteous. Jesus called them "whited sepulchres," beautiful on the outside, but full of dead bones inside. They venerated the tombs and memory of the prophets, but were guilty of the same sins as those who killed the prophets, Jesus said.

Today Pharisees can be found in many leading seminaries and denominational headquarters with names like St. Paul, St. John, St. Peter, or even Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist or Presbyterian, who reject the teaching of their saints and founders. Church traditions supersede Bible laws.

The Sadducees were the rich land-owners, a small minority with big influence on the high priests of religion. At one big gathering where the apostles were performing signs and wonders, healing both physical and mental disorders, the "high priest rose up and all those who were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison." Acts 5:12-18.

Sadducees denied the divinity of Christ, the authority of the law, the resurrection, angels and spirits Matt. 22:23. Once Paul used this dissention between the Pharisees and Sadducees to escape from them by getting them to fight among themselves Acts 23:6-12.

What about today? There are no churches named First Church of the Pharisees, or the Sadducees Temple, or Fundamentalist Scribes of America; but they are out there anyhow. We still have religious leaders who put their traditions above God's written Word. Denominational emphasis supersedes the Spirit of the Scriptures.

"It's all right to eat pigs because we have refrigeration today and Moses didn't," they say! "But don't touch wine, playing cards, go dancing or wear make-up or jewelry!" they add. "Don't go to movies or watch television, but it's OK to dramatize Biblical or religious events with distorted modern meanings. Don't offend other people even if they or it offends God. Obey any civil law or any court decision, but ignore Bible laws because they were all negated by Christ!" Pharisees, scribes, hypocrites, Jesus called them.

They love power, recognition acclaim by their religious crowds, their success is measured by popularity and quantity rather than humility and quality. They love to honor one another with plaques and prizes while they dishonor God's commands and standards. They lack compassion, pity, charity, mercy and understanding. They are self-righteous, but not right with God. These are the modern scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees.

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 2 Cor. 6: 17. Let the Bible be your Guide, the Holy Spirit your Teacher, Christ your Example and God your Judge.