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### **WHAT IS A PHARISEE?**

Greetings in Jesus!

Over the years I have done in-depth teaching on the subjects of fasting, worship (private and corporate), God's Word (reading, meditating, confessing) and prayer (praying with the understanding and in tongues). I have also explained that the two dominant themes in the New Testament are holiness and doctrinal accuracy.

In the past 15 years there has been a rapid rise in teachings that, in essence, turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 1:4) and release Believers from nearly all personal responsibility concerning spiritual growth and maturity. In fact, many such teachers declare that God's grace is so powerful and the blood of Jesus so cleansing that Christians do not need to repent if they sin, and that there is nothing in the Bible instructing Christians to repent for sin.

Included in this error is the teaching that fasting and extended times of worship, prayer and the Word (reading, meditating, confessing, etc) constitute works or fleshly efforts to grow in the Lord; instead of doing these things, people are told to just depend on the grace of God to someday produce all the spiritual growth God desires. Further, those who teach about the need for fasting and extended times of worship, prayer and the Word are sometimes called Pharisees who are trying to put Christians under legalistic bondage. Personally, I find this accusation to be quite interesting, for it reveals that those making such a charge are somewhat clueless as to what really is a Pharisee.

Unlike the Levitical Priesthood, the Pharisees were a group that God never established, but one created by man. The first deportation of Jews into Babylon took place around 600 B.C. This is the 70 years of captivity spoken of in the Bible. Around 539 B.C. the Persians conquered Babylon and Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to return home to rebuild the Temple (referenced in 2 Chronicles 36, Ezra, and first prophesied in Isaiah 44:24-28). However, he did not allow the Jews to restore their monarchy. This resulted in the priests becoming the ruling authority among the Jews.

During the time of resettling after the release from Babylonian captivity there was a tremendous amount of cultural unrest among the Jews. The Babylonians had destroyed many of the written Jewish historical and family records which resulted in many people claiming to be of Levitical descent and wanting the privileges of being a priest. Out of this turmoil various groups began to slowly emerge, with the two dominant being the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were generally viewed as elitist aristocrats made up of wealthier Jews. They did not get along very well with the Pharisees, in part because they had some strange beliefs, such as the denial of the resurrection and the desire to incorporate various Greek Hellenistic beliefs with Judaism.

The Pharisees were more respected by the Jewish commoner, which led to them gaining an increasingly stronger influence over the Jews. They considered themselves to be much holier than other Jews, more knowledgeable of the Jewish Law than the priests and more faithful in adhering to the Law than the priests; they even created their own special garments to distinguish themselves from the priests. While the Jewish priesthood was restricted to the tribe of Levi, the Pharisees had no such restriction. As time passed, the Pharisees gradually gained more influence over the Jews than the priests, although they still respected the order of the priesthood and the position held by the High Priest.

One of the biggest errors of the Pharisees was their doctrine. It is true that they strictly kept and taught the Law; however, they also adamantly kept and taught what is referred to as the Mishnah. In short, the Mishnah started out as the oral traditions of the Jews, later documented in written form. The Pharisees claimed that the Mishnah, along with the Law, was given to Moses from God while he was on Mt. Sinai. Even though there is absolutely nothing in the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) substantiating such a claim, the Pharisees nevertheless declared it to be true.

Generations of Jews were raised in this atmosphere and came to accept what the Pharisees said as being equal to or greater in value than what the priests said. In fact, Jesus encountered as much, or more, conflict and criticism from the Pharisees than He did from the Priests. One thing that absolutely infuriated the Pharisees was when Jesus exposed their teachings as not being from God. Here is just a sampling:

- In Matthew 5:20, Jesus revealed that the Pharisees were not as righteous as they professed and they did not have enough righteousness to get into Heaven.
- In Matthew 9:9-13, Jesus discredited the Pharisees' teaching that God did not love publicans and sinners (this distinction of "sinners" made by the Pharisees implied they did not believe that they themselves were sinners.)
- In Matthew 12:9-14, The Pharisees were humiliated when Jesus demonstrated that it was not a sin to get someone healed on the Sabbath (instead of rejoicing that someone had been healed, the Pharisees met to come up with a plan to kill Jesus).
- In Matthew 12:22-37, Jesus brought to light that the Pharisees weren't being used of God as they had led people to believe.
- In Matthew 15:1-20, Jesus shamed the Pharisees for teaching traditions (i.e. the Mishna) as being equal to the Word of God.

To summarize, the Pharisees acknowledged that the scriptures came from God, but they twisted and added to the scriptures to present doctrines that were not from God. If we think hard about this, we'll realize that the true, modern-day Pharisees are those who teach a twisted form of grace and a passive approach to spiritual growth, for they are adding to scriptures various self-contrived traditions and beliefs. Consider the following:

- Today's Pharisees teach that Christians do not need to repent if they sin. However, Acts 8:22, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 12:21, 2 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 6:1-8, Revelation 2:5,

Revelation 2:16, Revelation 2:21-22, Revelation 3:3 and Revelation 3:19 all speak of Christians needing to repent for such things as sin and rejecting the truth of God's Word.

- Today's Pharisees teach that God's grace will sovereignly produce holiness in the lifestyle of a Christian. However, Romans 6:12-13, Galatians 5:16-21, Ephesians 4:17-25, Colossians 3:4-14, 1 Peter 1:13-16 and Hebrews 12:1 all reveal that it is the responsibility of each Christian to lay down sin and live a holy life.
- Today's Pharisees teach that God's grace will also sovereignly produce spiritual maturity and that extended times of worship, prayer and the Word (reading, meditating and confessing) are works of human effort. However, there is nothing - absolutely *nothing* - in the Bible that even remotely hints that those things are works. In fact, just the opposite is true: In 2 Timothy 2:15 and 3:16-17, 1 Peter 2:2, 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,14 and Jude 1:20 God is telling Christians how critical it is to pray and spend time in His Word. Aside from that, plain old common sense should tell us that there is no way it is fruitless for us to spend extended times in worship, prayer and the Word with our God and Savior.
- Today's Pharisees teach that what Jesus said before His crucifixion was only for the Jews and is not relevant today. If that is so, then His instructions in John chapter three to be born again are not relevant for today; His instructions in Matthew chapter six about forgiving are not for today; His explanations in John 14 and 16 that the Holy Spirit would be our Comforter and Teacher mean nothing today; His statement in John 14:9, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" has absolutely no application or implication for Christians today. This list could get quite lengthy. It is beyond me how any Christian could truly believe that what Jesus said before His crucifixion has no pertinent value today.
- Today's Pharisees teach that telling Christians to repent for sin and to spend time in worship, prayer, the Word and fasting is putting them in legalistic, religious bondage. However, just the opposite is true. In John 8:32, Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This isn't simply the truth about being born again, it is the truth about every aspect of living as a child of God. Therefore, the amount of freedom in which I live is directly proportionate to the amount of truth I know and apply to my life. Scripture clearly reveals that prayer, fasting, worship and the Word directly impact Believers on a spiritual level, resulting in spiritual growth. The more I grow spiritually, the more I live in the freedom of my salvation. Therefore, leading Christians *away* from deliberate, focused prayer, fasting, worship and the Word *is actually keeping them in bondage Jesus died to deliver us from!*

In Matthew 24, Jesus warned that extremely persuasive false prophets would arise in the last days. His prophecy is manifesting before our eyes. Today's Pharisees are mixing God's Holy Truth with variations of traditions, scripture pulled out of context and mental reasoning to formulate doctrines that are leading people astray. Some of these Pharisees are pastoring churches with tens of thousands in attendance. I do not believe they are intentionally misleading people, but a person deceived can only teach out of that deception.

When someone preaches something that appeals to our flesh or requires less responsibility on our part, it can be a very attractive message. Yet we must remember that we will stand in judgment before God for what we do (2 Corinthians 5:10), what we believe (1 Corinthians 3:10-17) and

what we teach (Galatians 1:6-10). Can you imagine standing before God on the day of final judgment and trying to convince Him that He never said anything about His children needing to repent if they sin?

We must be like the Christians in Berea who searched the scriptures to find out if what they heard taught was true (Acts 17:10-11). We must guard our hearts against the good words and fair speeches of those who promise liberty, but actually lead into bondage (please read Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Peter 2:18-22). Jesus *is* coming back, and He is returning for a church that is unblamable and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27, Colossians 1:16-23). Let's keep pressing into God and we will be a part of that church...Hallelujah!

In His Grace,

*Jim*

Our recent Prayer and Power Conference was one of the best I have ever attended. The worship and the teaching were absolutely anointed of God. An MP3 of that conference is available. It has all the sermons, prophetic words and offering exhortations. You can request one of these MP3 CD's by using the form on the next page. Here is one of the prophecies:

*You have read in My Word that those who have accepted Jesus as Savior have been born again and born of My life and My nature. Spiritually speaking, you are My offspring, you are My children.*

*Too many of My children are too hard on themselves. So many of you want to serve Me and live for Me; you want to dedicate your lives to Me, but you expect too much of yourself. In My Word I have said that as babes in Christ, you are to sincerely desire the milk of My Word. Then as you mature, you should be moving on to the meat of My Word. But many of My children misunderstand that this is a process.*

*I want you to capture this image in the natural: When a baby is born, that baby can basically do nothing for itself. You must change its diapers, you must feed it, care for it; you teach it how to sit up, how to roll over, how to stand, how to walk, how to play with balls, all of these things. As that child grows, you as a parent are very proud to see that progress, but it is progress.*

*It's the same in your relationship with Me. When you are first born again, you are a spiritual babe. You have been born into a family where you never had existed. Everything is new, just like when a baby is first born, it is born into a world where it had never existed: there are smells, there are lights, there are colors, all kinds of things that the baby had never experienced in the womb and it's learning, day-by-day it's learning.*

*As My spiritual children, it is My desire for you to learn. As your Father, I will teach you, I will train you, I will help you understand what it means to be My child. I will take from that place of spiritual infancy to the place of full spiritual maturity. I do this teaching as I minister to you as the Holy Spirit. I help you understand the things in My Word, the things that will enable you to grow and develop and to know Me more closely.*

*But too many of My children confuse worldly intellect and knowledge with spiritual maturity, and there is a huge difference. Unless you spend time with Me, your Father, as I minister to you by the Holy Spirit and as you spend time in My Word and in fellowship with Me, this spiritual growth will not take place the way you think. For you see, the Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor (and) Teacher, they all play a role in My Kingdom, but none of them minister to you on a spiritual level; for I am God, I am your Father and I am a spirit and I'm the One who birthed you into existence.*

*So therefore, it is very critical that you spend time with Me so that I can nurture you, so that I can train you, so that I can help you understand the things you have been taught. I can help you understand My Word. And, I want you to know this: there is nothing in My Word that you cannot come to the place of understanding, for I have said that all scripture has been given by My inspiration. Therefore, since I have given it to you and I have said that it is profitable to you for your doctrine and your spiritual development, that means the potential of your new nature is that to where you will be able to understand everything in My Word. But it is a process, it is a process.*

*Just as I am patient and full of grace toward you, I want to encourage you to be patient with yourselves. No natural child graduates from high school after first grade. Be patient with yourself and stay in there with Me. Let Me teach you, let Me train you. Your growth and your development will come, it will take place, and you will begin to understand things about Me and about who you are in Me that you had never known.*

*So be patient with yourself. Continue to press into Me and let Me work with you so that you grow into the fullness of a mature child of mine that I so desire," says the Lord.*

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