

## Rediscovering the Pharisees Part 4



Imagine someone calling you a “Pharisee”. You would likely be offended by this association. It is understandable, but do you know why? Popular culture – especially Christian culture, has made “Pharisee” a derogatory term. Most people however – including Christians, don’t know very much about the Pharisees. And what they claim to know, is frequently wrong. The Pharisees deserve their derogatory status, but not for the reasons often heard. Discovering their true identity – that established in the pages of Scripture, will be the focus of this study.

### **1. RELEVANCE: Why study them?**

Through the discovery of their beliefs, we find answers to our own poor thinking as well as the reason so many (today) have embraced a false and damning version of Christianity. It is because our/their religion is no different than that of the Pharisees.

### **2. RELIGION: What were the main tenets/beliefs of the Pharisees?**

#### **2.1. Traditionalism (Mat 12:1-14, 15:1-14)**

Giving human tradition (the teachings, doctrine, beliefs, practices, principles, policies, commands, laws, justice and religion established by mankind) more authority than God’s Word (the teachings, doctrine, beliefs, practices, principles, policies, commands, laws, justice and religion established by the writers of Scripture). In other words, putting human reason above the revelation of God (Mat 12:1-14, 15:1-14; e.g. discipline as situational ethics in the church).

#### **2.2. Narcissism**

Living to experience praise, approval, love, neediness and respect from others or promote self (fulfillment, enjoyment, status and power) at the expense of others– including God. In other words, putting self-love (or loyalty) above love (or loyalty) to God (Mat 23:5-7; e.g. you care what people think of you more than you care what God thinks of you).

#### **2.3. Antinomianism**

Believing that faithfulness to all of God’s laws and established authorities is not required to be saved. Obedience is optional (nice but not necessary) and selective<sup>1</sup>. In other words, putting personal freedom and autonomy (self-rule/law; αὐτοῦ = self, νόμος = law) above God’s established laws and authorities. Antinomian is therefore just another word for anarchist<sup>2</sup>.

2.3.1. The fact that the Pharisees were devoted practitioners of both traditionalism and narcissism meant that they were (by default) also antinomians (Mat 23:25-28) = Notice Jesus mentions both the Pharisees’ traditionalism (vv25-26) and narcissism (vv27-28a) in His condemnation of them as not only hypocrites but antinomians (“full of lawlessness”).

2.3.2. The Pharisees viewed God’s law as optional (or not necessary to be saved) (Mat 3:7-10; Joh 8:31-39).

2.3.3. The Pharisees were selective in their obedience (Mat 23:1-4) = The Pharisees preached the tough stuff from God’s law (what Jesus means by “they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on people’s shoulders”). This however wasn’t the problem (Jesus calls for the people to “observe whatever they [the Pharisees] tell you”). It was the fact that the Pharisees made no attempt to practice those tougher laws themselves (“they preach, but do not practice...they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger”). IOW: as far it concerned their own obedience, it was selective. They did the easy stuff, but ignored the tough stuff. Jesus accuses them of the same thing in (Mat 23:23-24) = The Pharisees chose to obey what was easy and ignored or “neglected” what was tougher yet more important (the “weightier matters of the law”). Notice Jesus says “these you ought to have done *without neglecting the others* – i.e. no selective obedience; (Luk 16:16-17) = The Pharisees were attempting to be a part of God’s kingdom while being selective in what laws they chose to obey. Jesus makes it clear that such selectiveness will never be a part of salvation (v17 = Snowflake in hell); Hence the reason Jesus mentions them in His teaching on the importance of keeping all of the Law to salvation in (Mat 5:17-20).

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<sup>1</sup> The word antinomian comes from the Greek word, ἀνομος; (ἀ/anti = against, νόμος/nomos = law//against the law; “antinomian”) which is translated in the bible as “lawlessness”. You do not however have to be against all of God’s law/authorities to be identified by this term. The term is also used to refer to those who are selective in their obedience. Essentially anyone not adhering to all of God’s laws/authorities is antinomian (Mat 24:12; Rom 6:19; Act 21:21-22).

<sup>2</sup> The definition of anarchy includes opposition to the law (def. the absence of authority *and law*).

2.3.4. The Pharisees were also anarchists. They were against (or chronically suspicious) of all authority (Mat 21:23 = The Pharisees were always questioning whether Jesus possessed legitimate authority even though the fruit of his labors testified to it. Jesus showed that those truly doing the Father's will are those who submit to His established authorities versus standing around always questioning it or asking for a sign – Mat 16:1-4)<sup>3</sup>.

2.3.5. As with their other beliefs, antinomianism was another reason the Pharisees could not understand the Scriptures (i.e. were poor thinkers) and missed Jesus (as their Messiah) (Joh 7:17-19).

2.3.6. The combination of these three: traditionalism (tradition over truth), narcissism (self over others/God) and antinomianism (freedom over authority and laws) is essentially what it means to be an American today (and one of the reasons we have become such poor thinkers).

2.3.7. The same is true in the American church. Like the Pharisees, evangelical Christians are devoted practitioners of antinomianism.

“Since the time of the Reformation, evangelicalism has proven powerless to check repeated outbreaks of antinomianism in churches... resulting in large fringes of congregants today imbued with the heresy. One prominent Lutheran theologian has dubbed antinomianism ‘the heresy of the American church.’”<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.3.8. Why evangelicalism is so steeped in antinomianism:

2.3.8.1. Its gospel is antinomian (salvation is by faith alone )

2.3.8.2. Its view on Paul and the law (“Paul preached Christ as the end of the law in Romans 10:4”; See Act 21:17-24; also Rom 3:31 and again Jesus in Mat 5:17-20)

2.3.8.3. Its doctrines regarding the work of Christ (e.g. Active Obedience and Penal Substitution)

2.3.8.4. Its failure to understand what general revelation teaches us about God's justice and righteousness (Psa 19:1-8; Rom 1:18-20 w/Psa 33:5 = The earth is full of what God loves and is His central attribute: justice [Psa 9:7, 89:14] = The laws of nature are absolute, consistent and w/o discrimination or bias [e.g. The temperature snow melts/water freezes 32 degrees F]; Hence Deu 16:20 and Num 15:15-16; Because they don't understand that, they practice situational ethics, discipline based on emotions – and ultimately antinomianism [they subvert the law]).

#### 2.3.9. How you know that you (in step with the Pharisees) will also be viewed by Jesus as an antinomian:

2.3.9.1. You are an evangelical/hold to the evangelical gospel (of faith alone)

2.3.9.2. You refuse to excommunicate all those guilty of what the OT identifies as capital crimes (limiting it simply to what you find in the NT - 1Co 5:1-5)

2.3.9.3. You tell people something similar to “that's OT law and it no longer applies to God's people under the NT” (Mat 5:17-20)

2.3.9.4. You tell people something similar to, “don't sweat the small stuff, focus on the big stuff” (Mat 23:23-24)

2.3.9.5. You believe tithing is optional (2Co 9:7)

2.3.9.6. You think that by your obedience or good works in one area you can get rid of your neglect or disobedience in others (Mat 7:21-23)

2.3.9.7. You are constantly questioning or condemning or refusing to submit to those authorities God places over you – including those in the church (Mat 18:17-18 w/1Co 6:1-3; Rom 13:1-2).

2.3.9.8. You are characterized as a disobedient person or continue to practice (“struggle”) with certain sins (1Jo 3:4).

#### **CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE = RUN FROM THE RELIGION OF THE PHARISEES.**

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<sup>3</sup> According to Josephus, the anarchist influence of the Pharisees was instrumental in starting the Jewish-Roman war that ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple - and their nation, in 70 A.D.

<sup>4</sup> Rainbow (The Way Of Salvation, p. xvii, xx).