

DID JESUS TELL US TO OBEY THE PHARISEES?

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Hopefully ... we are all diligent Bible readers? The Bible contains the “Words of Life”!

But the Bible does deal with times long past ... and we sometimes struggle to fully understand some of the situations or circumstances that we come across.

When we’re reading the Gospels and Acts we often come across reference to a group of people called the Pharisees. Jesus and the Apostles had many run-ins with the Pharisees.

Who were they? What did they teach? Should we heed the teachings of the Pharisees?

Some people think that the Pharisees do indeed have authority over believers — that we should respect their views. Some point to Jesus and say that Jesus taught believers to obey the Pharisees.

So today ... I want to look at who the Pharisees were ... and how we should view them.

At the very least ... it should give us some reasonable background. That may also help us to avoid some false doctrine — even among the Churches of God.

Matthew 23:1-3

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,

2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

3 "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.

To “sit in Moses’ seat” = authority. Do what they say.

So. Should we do what the Pharisees say?

Mr Bill Dankenbring thought so. Likewise others too.

Here's a potential problem.

- The Pharisees teach that Passover is on the evening of 15th Nisan.
- The Pharisees teach that Pentecost is on Sivan 6th.

What the Jews keep today. What Mr Dankenbring taught (and others still do so).

But we don't! So ... are we disobeying Jesus' instructions?

I will come back to that later. 😊

The subject of the Pharisees' authority over us cropped up in the fellowship I was in about 15 years ago. One sermonette-giver sent out a series of emails ... lots of scriptures ... assuring us of the accuracy of the Pharisees' teaching — quoting Jesus in Matthew 23 ... even pointing out 2 great Pharisees we should heed — Gamaliel and Paul. He believed that the Pharisees were accurate teachers of God's laws.

I don't think so!

Firstly ... who were the Pharisees? Mentioned just under 90 times in the New Testament ... mostly the Gospels.

They were a sect of Judaism (a man-made religion) ... starting about 200 BC. They believed the priests were not fit to educate the people ... being corrupt and untrustworthy.

They saw themselves as replacement educators. They controlled the synagogues ... which is where most people actually heard God's Word. In Jesus' day there were about 2.5 million Jews living in the Holy Land. The Pharisees numbered about 6,000 (as per Josephus) — so about 1/5 of 1% of the population.

Most Jews back then weren't very religious. The synagogue in Nazareth could only hold 75 people ... though the smallest city in Galilee was in excess of 15,000. People weren't interested ... jut like today.

The Pharisees were made up of teachers ... politicians ... businessmen ... ministers and even included women.

They saw themselves as an exclusive fraternity — sticklers for Levitical purity and strict observers of religious duties.

However ... they had no uniform creed. There was no compulsion to agree on doctrine. They had huge disagreements and arguments ... with different schools — some believing one thing and some believing very differently. At times ... this led to bloodshed! Yet ... they were all ceremonially pure.

They came to believe that the scriptures were out-of-date — were insufficient for salvation.

They claimed that God now brought new revelation through them. They started to produce thousands of new laws and commandments — often completely contradicting God's Word!

They claimed that they had access to ORAL LAW — passed down by word of mouth from Moses — that allowed them to give better understanding than the scriptures.

Their teachings were collected latterly in The Talmud ... which contains a written record of teachings and debates of rabbis over the centuries. Over 30 volumes in length (about 6,000 pages). They dwarf the Bible! And it's full of nonsense (so people say)?!

We're supposed to heed their teachings (which??). Really?

What does the Bible reveal?

Mark 7:1-13

1 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.

2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.

3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. (Their teachings)

4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

5 Then **the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"**

6 **He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:**

**'This people honours Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.**

**7 And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**

8 **"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."**

9 He said to them, **"All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."**

10 "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

11 "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"--' (that is, a gift to God),

12 "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

13 **"making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down."** And many such things you do."

Eating with unwashed hands had nothing to do with hygiene! They were concerned you might be spiritually unclean. Even the water had to be "special".

They rejected God's commandments — their teachings made God's Word of no effect!

So. Should we heed and respect a teaching which contradicts and nullifies God's Word?

It still happens today in many churches. Church "traditions" often carry greater weight than scripture. Think of Christmas! Or the Immortal Soul? What about Sunday church going? What about the Churches of God that teach we should have 7 offerings per year when the Bible says 3 times per year?

John 5:36-47

36 "But I have a greater **witness** than John's; **for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.**

37 "**And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me.** You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.

38 "**But you do not have His word abiding in you,** because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

39 "**You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.**

40 "**But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.**

41 "I do not receive honor from men.

42 "But I know you, that **you do not have the love of God in you.** (You Pharisees)

43 "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

44 "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?

45 "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust.

46 "**For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.**

47 "**But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"**

They searched the scriptures — but didn't recognise the Messiah!! Blind!!

Verses 46-47: They don't believe the Torah! They don't believe Moses!! (They still don't today ... they say it's myth . They look to the Rabbis views).

Listen to these men? Yet — didn't Jesus command us to in Matthew 23:3?

Luke 16:10-15

10 "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

11 "**Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?**

12 "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon.**"

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. (*"Derided" ... turned up their nose at Jesus*)

15 And He said to them, "**You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God**"

These Pharisees were lovers of money — a root of all evil! These men were abominations in God's sight?

Luke 18:9-14

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, **one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee prayed with himself! He was self-exalted — arrogant — spiritually blind.

Matthew 16:1-12

1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.

2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red';

3 "and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' **Hypocrites!** You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

5 Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.

6 **Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."**

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

8 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?"

9 "Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up?"

10 "Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?"

11 "How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?--but to **beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

12 **Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread,** but of **the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

Beware of the leaven — the doctrine — the teaching — of the Pharisees.

Leaven is a picture of sin ... evil ... their teaching is destructive!! BEWARE!
DON'T FALL FOR IT!

Matthew 12:22-27

22 **Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw.**

23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

24 Now **when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."**

25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?"

27 "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

They accused Jesus of using the power of the devil.

Matthew 12:31-32

31 **"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.**

32 "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but **whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.**

They were 1mm away from committing the unpardonable sin? Maybe they had done it??

Matthew 12:33-37

33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.

34 **"Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

35 **"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.**

36 "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

37 "For **by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.**"

Vipers! Snakes! Evil — with evil hearts and evil words.

It doesn't look to me that these people should be our guides and mentors.

The man that I mentioned earlier that had written to us all ... wrote that the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee and used his training to great advantage when he was converted.

Let's have a look at what Paul himself said about his training as a Pharisee.

Galatians 1:6-7

6 **I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,**

7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:10-14

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, *(KJV: Jews' religion)* how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul ... was an expert in Judaism (KJV: Jews' religion) — not scripture but the thousands of laws and commandments of rabbis.

But since his conversion ... none of Paul's teachings came from the Pharisees ... but from divine revelation.

Philippians 3:2-9

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,

4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Paul counted his former conduct ... ways — Pharisee life style as rubbish (KJV: Dung!).

Paul didn't consider the teaching of the Pharisees to be valuable! Dung!

It led him to persecute — arrest — and kill the true saints. He was zealously opposed to Jesus!

In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul explains that even today when the Old Testament is read by the Jews ... a “veil” lies over the Jews’ hearts such that they cannot understand the Old Testament. The veil is only removed when you turn to Jesus.

So the Pharisees — according to Paul — can't understand The Truth.

In John 8 ... Jesus said they were of their father the devil!

Remember “The Sermon on The Mount” series. Jesus often said “Ye have heard it said — but I say to you”. What they had heard said was what they were taught in the synagogues — by the Pharisees. Jesus had to correct their twisting and corruption!

Let's have a closer look at Matthew 23.

So we're supposed to live by the teachings of the Pharisees? They have authority over us?

Matthew 23:13

13 "But **woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** **For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men;** for you neither go in yourselves, **nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.**

The Pharisees shut up the Kingdom of Heaven so that men can't go in! One translation says: “You lock people out ... ”

Matthew 23:15

15 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For **you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.**

Those who follow you become sons of hell! You are going into the Lake of Fire.

Matthew 23:16

16 "**Woe to you, blind guides**, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'

Blind guides. Who wants a blind guide?!!

Matthew 23:27-28

27 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For **you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

28 "**Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

They were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 23:33

33 "**Serpents, brood of vipers!** How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (*Gehenna ... lake of Fire*)

Serpents! To be condemned!

These are blind ... lawless ... greedy ... hypocritical snakes and fools — who turn converts into sons of hell. They don't believe the writings of Moses. No wonder Jesus warned his disciples to BEWARE THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES!

Matthew 23:1-3

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,

2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.

3 "**Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.**

Should we keep the Passover on 15 Nisan and Pentecost on Sivan 6?

Moses seat? That term is not used elsewhere in the Bible. Scholars think that it may have been the name of a seat in the synagogue that the Pharisees sat in when they taught. But conveys NO AUTHORITY FROM GOD.

Interestingly ... the NASB gives verse 2 as: “The Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses”.

The Pharisees have no Godly authority to teach anyone. They were self-made ... so-called experts who couldn't even recognise the Messiah when He was standing right in front of them.

Whatever they tell you to observe? Whatever??

The explanation of verse 3 ... which is consistent with all the scriptures we've looked at — and it all boils down to Greek grammar. Mr Bullinger explains it well.

The Greek in verse 3 can be translated in two ways ... and is up to the translator to choose which way best suits the context.

The verb can either be translated as an imperative — a command. Or the alternative — as an indicative ... merely expressing a statement of fact ... indicating something that's taking place.

Translators went with the imperative ... Jesus commands whatever the Pharisees tell you to do — do it!!

But of course ...that makes no sense! “Beware the doctrine of the Pharisees but make sure to do whatever they say”?!

The alternative is: “Whatever they tell you to observe ... you are observing and doing”. But don't do it! Don't copy them! Beware!

“You are foolishly listening to the instruction of these money-loving blind guides ... who will turn you into a son of hell and lock you out of the Kingdom of heaven! **Don't do anything they do**”!

There are bound to have been a few decent Pharisees — maybe Gamaliel — maybe Nicodemus — but on the whole ... as a category ... these men and

women were hostile to God — ignorant of scripture — made the Word of God of none effect through their myriad of traditions.

In Matthew 15:14 Jesus said to His disciples: “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind”.

Don't let anyone use the example of the Pharisees ... and Jesus' words in Matthew 23:3 ... to convince you to accept false teaching — whether Mr Dankenbring or others who hold the same views.

And it that's not a concern ... at least when you read about the Pharisees in the gospels ... it may have a little more meaning?