

## The Spirit Of The Pharisees

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When Jesus was on earth his greatest enemies were a group of men referred to as the Pharisees. Who were these men? Why did they fight so hard against Jesus? Do they still exist? And what was the spirit that motivated them?

The term Pharisee appears 100 times in 95 verses of the New Testament. They first appear (in a negative connotation) with the ministry of John the Baptist (Mt 3:1-12) but no explanation is given as to where they came from and they appear nowhere in the Old Testament. They do, however, pop up in the histories written by Josephus (37-c.100AD), the ancient Jewish historian.

The description that Josephus gives of the Pharisees is as follows: They were a religious sect who professed to do all things whereby they might please God.<sup>1</sup> In their zeal for religion they delivered to the people a large number of religious observances, handed down from generation to generation, which were not in the Law of Moses.<sup>2</sup> They showed respect to their elders, were careful in their diet, and used reason as a guide for their decisions. They believed in the eternity of the soul and that the wicked would spend eternity in an everlasting prison while the righteous would be resurrected to live again. They had a reputation and respect amongst the people because of their virtuous life and sermons.<sup>3</sup> They valued themselves highly upon their skill in interpreting the law

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<sup>1</sup> "Now Hyrcanus was a disciple of theirs, and greatly beloved by them. And when he once invited them to a feast, and entertained them very kindly, when he saw them in a good humor, he began to say to them, that they knew he was desirous to be a righteous man, and to do all things whereby he might please God, which was the profession of the Pharisees also (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 13:10:5:289)."

<sup>2</sup> "What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers; and concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude of their side... (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 13:10:6:297)."

<sup>3</sup> "Now, for the Pharisees, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced; and, when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to

of Moses and made people to believe that they were highly favored by God, yet in reality they were cunning mischief makers.<sup>4</sup> Their influence was so great that when they took a public stand against the king or high priest, the people would side with them<sup>5</sup> and during the reign of Queen Alexandra of Jerusalem (76-67BC) the Pharisees were so powerful that they became the de facto rulers of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

The New Testament indicates that when Jesus was ministering on the earth that his greatest opposition came from the Pharisees and it was they who

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make a temperament, whereby what he wills is done, but so that the will of men can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 13:18:3:12-15)."

<sup>4</sup> "...for there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 17:2:4:41)." I have assumed that "law of their fathers" here refers to the Law of Moses. It may, however, refer to the Pharisaical laws of their ancestors. The picture painted in the New Testament is one in which they are described as thinking that they were elitist in their understanding of the Old Testament (Jn 9:1-34).

<sup>5</sup> "However, this prosperous state of affairs moved the Jews to envy Hyrcanus; but they that were the worst disposed to him were the Pharisees, who are one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great a power over the multitude, that when they say anything against the king or against the high priest, they are presently believed (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 13:10:5:288). "

<sup>6</sup> "Alexander left behind him two sons, Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, but committed the kingdom to Alexandra. Now, as to these two sons, Hyrcanus was indeed unable to manage public affairs, and delighted rather in a quiet life; but the younger, Aristobulus, was an active and a bold man; and for this woman herself, Alexandra, she was loved by the multitude, because she seemed displeased at the offenses her husband had been guilty of. So she made Hyrcanus high priest because he was the elder, but much more because he cared not to meddle with politics, **and permitted the Pharisees to do everything; to whom also she ordered the multitude to be obedient.** She also restored again those practices which the Pharisees had introduced, according to the traditions of their forefathers, and which her father-in-law, Hyrcanus, had abrogated. **So she had indeed the name of the Regent; but the Pharisees had the authority; for it was they who restored such as had been banished, and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and, to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords** (*Antiquities Of The Jews*, 13:16:1:407-409)."

ultimately had him crucified.<sup>7</sup> The general consensus amongst conservative scholars is that they were motivated by jealousy over the popularity of Jesus and anger over his public and private condemnation of their spirituality.

Everyone knows that the Pharisees existed in Jesus time but one may wonder do they exist now? There are no people today who refer to themselves as Pharisees. However, it would seem logical that the tendencies that expressed themselves in the Pharisees would be tendencies which were present in all generations. Though a person may not call themselves a Pharisee they may, in actuality, act just like one. In order to answer the question of whether the Pharisees exist today we need to examine the qualities that were associated with this group.

<b>Pharisees Appear Like Real Christians In Many Respects</b>	
Pharisees believe in prayer.	Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Lk 18:10
Pharisees will go to great lengths and self-sacrifice in order to fulfill their religious rituals.	Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market,

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<sup>7</sup> Mk 14:1-2LITV: "And it was the Passover, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread after two days. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how, having seized Him by guile, they might kill Him. But they said, Not during the Feast, lest there will be a tumult of the people."

Jn 11:45-53LITV: "Then many of the Jews, those coming to Mary, and having seen what Jesus did, believed into Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled a sanhedrin, and said, What are we doing, for this man does many miraculous signs? If we let Him alone this way, all will believe into Him, and the Romans will come and will take away from us both the place and the nation. But a certain one of them, Caiaphas being high priest of that year, said to them, You know nothing, nor consider that it is profitable for us that one man die for the people, and not all the nation to perish. But he did not say this from himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was about to die on behalf of the nation, and not only on behalf of the nation, but that He also might gather into one the children of God who had been scattered. Then from that day, they took counsel that they might kill Him."

	except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Mk 7:1-4
Pharisees often practice spiritual disciplines.	Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? Mt 9:14
Pharisees have doctrines that they hold to and teach.	Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. Mt 16:6-12
<b>Though They Look Like Christians In Many Ways, Pharisees Have Very Different Attitudes And Practices Than Real Christians Do. And God Views Pharisees Very Differently Than He Views Christians.</b>	

<p>Pharisees do not reach out to the lost but purposefully avoid them.</p>	<p>And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Mt 9:9-13</p>
<p>Pharisees call things that are right, wrong.</p>	<p>As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. Mt 9:32-34</p>
<p>Pharisees call things that are wrong, right.</p>	<p>Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders...Then the Pharisees and scribes</p>

	<p>asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctines the commandments of men. 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 ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. Mk 7:1-13</p>
Pharisees are really fighting to destroy what Jesus did.	Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. Mt 12:14
Pharisees do not recognize the handiwork of God.	Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were

	<p>amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. Mt 12:22-24</p>
<p>Pharisees require supernatural confirmation before they will believe what God has revealed through Jesus.</p>	<p>Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Mt 12:38-40</p>
<p>Pharisees are more devoted to their traditions than they are to the commandments of God, even allowing their traditions to override God's commandments.</p>	<p>Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth</p>

	<p>nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Mt 15:1-9</p>
<p>Pharisees, rather than being humble enough to admit that they are wrong, are offended when their errors are pointed out to them.</p> <p>Pharisees are blind and misleading others to their own peril.</p>	<p>And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Mt 15:10-14</p>
<p>Pharisees look for Biblical loopholes to allow them to divorce their spouses.</p>	<p>And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.</p>



	<p>What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery. Mk 10:2-12</p>
<p>Pharisees try to entangle their enemies in their talk.</p>	<p>Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. Mt 22:15</p>
<p>Pharisees tell people to do one thing but then do the opposite themselves.</p>	<p>Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Mt 23:1-3</p>
<p>Pharisees will cause (make) other people do things that they themselves will not do.</p>	<p>For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Mt 23:4</p>
<p>Pharisees do good things in the community but only so that others will see them doing it.</p>	<p>But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments... Mt 23:5</p>
<p>Pharisees love to be in the center of attention.</p>	<p>And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues... Mt 23:6</p>

<p>Pharisees love to be referred to by special titles.</p>	<p>And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. Mt 23:7-12</p>
<p>Pharisees refuse to be saved and, ultimately, are keeping other people from going to Heaven by their actions.</p>	<p>But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Mt 23:13</p>
<p>Pharisees focus on the external rituals of religion while overlooking the more important internal aspects of righteousness.</p>	<p>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Mt 23:23</p>
<p>Pharisees are blind spiritually.</p>	<p>Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Mt 23:24</p>
<p>Pharisees focus on making a good external appearance while ignoring what is in their heart.</p>	<p>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and</p>

	<p>platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Mt 23:25-28</p>
<p>Pharisees claim allegiance and affinity with the great preachers of the past, yet reject the messages that they preached.</p>	<p>Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Mt 23:29-33</p>
<p>Pharisees get upset when Christians try to reach out to very worldly sinners (drug addicts, prostitutes, etc.).</p>	<p>And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Lk 5:29-31</p> <p>And the Pharisees and scribes</p>

	murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. Lk 15:2
Pharisees have rejected the will of God for their lives.	But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. Lk 7:30
Pharisees place a higher value on material goods than God does.	And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. Lk 16:14
Pharisees think highly of themselves because they obey some of God's commandments.  Pharisees are not justified in God's eyes because they will not acknowledge their sinfulness.	Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Lk 18:10-14
Pharisees do not want Jesus or God to receive the glory that they deserve and will actually make an effort to keep others from giving it to Him.	And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in

	heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. Lk 19:37-40
Pharisees put pressure on people to not acknowledge the truth about Jesus.	Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: Jn 12:42
Pharisees will work very hard to convert others to their way of thinking.  The result of being discipled by a Pharisee is that the person will go to Hell.  Pharisees are headed for Hell.	Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Mt 23:15
Pharisees take advantage of others.  Pharisees do religious things (prayer, fasting, religious service attendance, etc.) just to impress people, not out of love for God.  Pharisees will receive a greater condemnation on Judgment Day.	Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Mt 23:14
Pharisees will not go to Heaven.	For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Mt 5:20

**To summarize we note that Pharisees...**

- Believe in prayer
- Will go to great lengths and self-sacrifice in order to fulfill their religious rituals
- Often practice spiritual disciplines
- Have doctrines that they hold to and teach
- Do not reach out to the lost but purposefully avoid them
- Call things that are right, wrong and likewise, things that are wrong they call right
- Are really fighting to destroy what Jesus did
- Do not recognize the handiwork of God
- Require supernatural confirmation before they will believe what God has revealed through Jesus
- Are more devoted to their traditions than they are to the commandments of God, even allowing their traditions to override God's commandments
- Are offended when their errors are pointed out to them
- Are blind and misleading others to their own peril
- Look for Biblical loopholes to allow them to divorce their spouses
- Try to entangle their enemies in their talk
- Tell people to do one thing but then do the opposite themselves
- Will cause (make) other people do things that they themselves will not do
- Do good things in the community but only so that others will see them doing it
- Love to be in the center of attention
- Love to be referred to by special titles
- Refuse to be saved and, ultimately, are keeping other people from going to Heaven by their actions
- Focus on the external rituals of religion while overlooking the more important internal aspects of righteousness
- Are blind spiritually
- Focus on making a good external appearance while ignoring what is in their heart
- Claim allegiance and affinity with the great preachers of the past, yet reject the messages that they preached
- Get upset when Christians try to reach out to very worldly sinners
- Have rejected the will of God for their lives
- Place a higher value on material goods than God does

- Think highly of themselves because they obey some of God's commandments
- Are not justified in God's eyes because they will not acknowledge their sinfulness
- Do not want Jesus or God to receive the glory that they deserve and will actually make an effort to keep others from giving it to Him
- Put pressure on people to not acknowledge the truth about Jesus
- Take advantage of others
- Do religious things just to impress people, not out of love for God
- Will work very hard to convert others to their way of thinking
- Are leading their disciples to Hell
- Are headed for Hell themselves
- Will suffer greater condemnation on Judgment Day
- Will not go to Heaven

When we look at the characteristics of the Pharisees we realize that they are indeed alive and well today, though they may not call themselves Pharisees. Our churches are filled with men and women who, under the guise of a religious appearance, operate no differently than the Pharisees did and they exercise practically just as much effort at fighting against the true believers as the Pharisees did against Jesus.

We often wonder why there are some people in our churches who seem totally supportive of *everything* that they can read in the Bible, while others will only support *some* of what they read. We notice that oftentimes these two groups will clash with each other. It is truly as if the two are motivated by different spirits. You can be certain that anytime someone in your church is fighting against the Spirit of Christ and His will that they are motivated by the spirit of the Pharisees.

Before we close we will answer our final question: what was the *spirit* that motivated them then and now motivates the modern day Pharisees? That spirit is the spirit of Satan.

May God help us to resist the spirit of the Pharisees in our hearts, lives and churches.