

Considering the Pharisees

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In the time of Jesus and the New Testament there are a number of sects of Judaism that are important to understand for the sake of the events of the Gospel.

	Pharisees	Sadducees	Herodians	Zealots
History	The Pharisee ("separatist") party emerged largely out of the group of scribes and sages. It may refer to their separation from Gentiles. The Pharisees were active from the middle of the second century BCE until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.	Sadducees took their name from the High Priest Zadok (literally, Zadokites). His name meant "righteous", and they controlled the temple and the priesthood.	What is known of them is only what is in the Bible. It is assumed they supported the independent monarchy of the Herod family	The Zealots founded by Judas of Galilee in the year 6 against the Romans.
Belief	They believed in the entire OT, angels, and a resurrection of the dead.	They believed only in the first five books of the law, and did not believe in resurrection.	Unknown.	Per Josephus they <i>"agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord"</i> . (18.1.6)

Jesus engaged with these groups in different ways. The Apostle Simon was a zealot. Paul was a Pharisee. The disciple Manaen may have been a Herodian (Acts 13:1). But Jesus mainly had critical points of these sects. The Sadducees denied the Word of God (Matthew 22:23-33) by denying the resurrection. The Herodians wanted to destroy Him (Matthew 22:16-21). The Zealots lived by the sword (Matthew 26:52) and take the kingdom by force (John 18:36). Jesus had the most to say to the Pharisees.

To be clear, the great confusion for many is what Jesus actually said about the Pharisees, and who they really were. It is often times the case that we vilify them in general, without actually looking at what Jesus really said about them. Like many things, they were complicated. Fundamentally, the mistake many make is that they do not know that Jesus NEVER accused the Pharisees of being wrong for being too mindful of the Law, of practicing the law too strictly, or of being legalists (a term absent in the Bible).

The real problems with the Pharisees:

1. They loved money (Luke 16:13-14)

2. They loved preeminence (Matthew 23:5-8, John 12:43)

3. They refused to keep the Law (John 7:19,32)

4. They created new laws that were merely their traditions (Matthew 15:1-9)

But not everything about the Pharisees was bad; in fact, while Jesus was more critical of them than any other group, there is more said that is good about them than any other sect too. Consider that it is the

Pharisees that have the most interest in Jesus; they visit Him numerous times in the New Testament, and He even meets with them on occasion. That interest was not purely to harm Him.

Ten Commandments	Pharisees Breaking Them
No other gods before Me	Luke 7:30 – Rejecting the will of God
You shall not make idols.	Matthew 23:16 – The gold higher than the temple
You shall not take the name of God in vain	Matthew 22:15-16 – Lied about God
Remember the Sabbath day	Mark 3:4 – Taught it was unlawful to do good
Honor your father and your mother	Matthew 15:3-6 – Broke this commandment
You shall not murder	John 11:57 – Murdering Jesus
You shall not commit adultery	Matthew 19:3-9 – Divorce without cause
You shall not steal	Matthew 23:14 – Stole from widows
You shall not bear false witness	Matthew 22:15,18 – False witnesses against Jesus
You shall not covet	Luke 11:39 – Full of greed and envy

Consider too that there are a number of men who are Pharisees who are righteous. Gamaliel was a great teacher of the Pharisees, and he defended the Apostles in Acts 5. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Pharisees, and was also a disciples of Jesus (who buried Jesus). In Acts 15:4 we are told that there were Pharisees who had become Christians. Finally, the Apostle Paul identifies himself in the present tense as a Pharisee on numerous occasions, most clearly in Acts 23:6.

Even in their faults there are some things to consider. In Matthew 23:2-3, when Jesus pronounces the woes against them, He tells His disciples that they did have a knowledge of the word. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses them as the standard to beat for righteousness when He said *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20).

Too often today people misapply the error of the Pharisees to something meaningless. They say things like *"You are legalistic law keeper – a Pharisee"* or *"You call others wrong – a Pharisee"* or *"You won't change with the times – a Pharisee"*. These accusations are false, and fail to comprehend the real issue with the Pharisees.

Who are the Pharisees today?

1. Those who are guilty of the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10). Religious leader/churches who Insist on tithing, Constantly ask for money, or Seek collections all the time are guilty of the sins of the Pharisees

2. Those who are guilty of loving preeminence (3 John 9-10). Religious leaders / churches who Love titles (Pastor, Reverend, Father, Doctor), Love clerical roles and robes, or Want to be seen as ordained are guilty of the sins of the Pharisees.

3. Those who are guilty of creating new laws and breaking existing ones (1 Corinthians 4:6). Religious leaders / churches who Have creeds, rules or laws of men, or Have counsels or church heads, or Do not obey God's rules entirely are guilty of the sins of the Pharisees.

What is ironic is that most of these sins are the very same people who accuse others of being Pharisees. It is no wonder that the word Jesus used most often to describe Pharisees is the one that most today are guilty of: HYPOCRISY.