

## THE PHARISEES

An Article by  
Pastor Kemi Illori  
Living Hope Church  
LEEDS

[pastorkemi@livinghopechurch.co.uk](mailto:pastorkemi@livinghopechurch.co.uk)

The name “Pharisee” means the Separated One. The Pharisees are a Jewish sect (Acts 15:5). They believe in the religion of their forefathers, Judaism, but their religious practices were based not only on the Torah (the Law) but on interpretations and rules handed down over the generations. These interpretations and rules were described as “the commandments of men” by Jesus. (Matthew 15:9)

The Pharisees’ devotion to their religion was greater than their devotion to God. (Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5) They were very strict in their observance of the Mosaic Law. (Mark 7:3, 5-8; Galatians 1:14) Their teaching was described as a kind of leaven that must be avoided by those who accept Jesus Christ. (Matthew 16:6)

The emphasis of the teachings of the Pharisees was on the outward appearance of believers and their attachment to ceremonial behaviour. Accordingly, they paid enormous attention to outward details and neglected the purity of heart that God required. (Matthew 23:23, Luke 18:11) They fasted religiously, they prayed in order to be seen and heard, they prayed in order to show off, they loved to display their kindness in order to win the praise of onlookers. (Luke 5:33; Luke 18:12; Matthew 23:5-7, 15) They loved money more than God, and were cruel persecutors of the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples. (John 5:16, 18; John 7:19-20; Matthew 12:14; Acts 9:1-2; Philippians 3:5-6)

The Lord Jesus spoke about their hypocrisy and warned that their actions would prevent them from entering the kingdom of God. (Matthew 21:31-32) The Pharisees were particularly guilty of:

- Self-righteousness – Luke 7:36-37
- Self-justification – Luke 16:14-15
- Spiritual blindness - John 3:1-10
- Perversion of Scripture – Matthew 15:1-9
- Hindering potential believers – John 9:16-22
- Refusal to repent and accept the Lord Jesus – Matthew 12:24-34

For these reasons, Jesus Christ described them as:

- Vipers – Matthew 12:24, 34
- Blind – Matthew 15:12-14
- Hypocrites – Matthew 23:13-19
- Serpents – Matthew 23:33
- Children of the devil – John 8:13, 44

### **John the Baptist on the Pharisees**

Mt 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

### **The Pharisees' self-righteousness**

Mt 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Mt 15:2-3, 6 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread... He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?... 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

Mt 19:3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

Mt 21:31-32 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

### **The Pharisees' spiritual blindness**

Mt 9:34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."

Mt 12:2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

Mt 12:24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

Mt 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

Mt 16:1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.

### **Jesus's instruction for believers**

Mt 5:20 "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.

### **Jesus's Description of the Pharisees**

Mt 23:13 "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.

Mt 23:14 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Mt 23:15 "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.

Mt 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Mt 23:25-27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. 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.