

CONFESSIONS OF A NEW TESTAMENT PHARISEE

The Apostle Paul states in Acts 26:5 “*that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*” To better understand the full weight of the declaration/accusation we must first do some research into the Pharisees.

The word Pharisee comes from a root meaning “separated one.” They appeared in the last half of the 2nd century B.C. during the reign of John Hyrcanus. The sect developed as an attempt to combat Hellenism which was spread by the Greeks as Alexander the Great conquered the known world. As his kingdom expanded, he frequently established new cities for the purpose of spreading Greek culture and religion. By mid-2nd century B.C., Hellenistic rituals had become incorporated in the Jewish lifestyle and practice. During the Maccabean revolt conscientious Jews began to separate themselves from the influence of Hellenism and a sect was born.

While the movement had good intentions, man’s pride soon began to morph the sect into something less about purity of worship and more about collecting accolades. Jesus taught a parable to emphasize the depth of the attitude in Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisee, completely self-absorbed, dismissed the humble Publican.

As we pass through this life, how often do we look at the sinfulness of this world and forget that we are sinners (Romans 3:23)? How many times have we dismissed those caught up in sin as not worthy of our help, positive encouragement, love and of the salvation God offers to all? As I write these words, I confess that I often relate to the Pharisees of Mark 2:16 “*And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?*”

Josephus said of the Pharisees that they “appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately.” Jesus used the Pharisees’ practice of making “*broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments*” as an example of an improper attitude toward God and mankind in Matthew 23:5. They stressed rituals that could be seen of men and an outward appearance of piety as a substitute for a pure heart toward God. It is easy for us today to make a ritual of our worship when we adopt a mindset that we have accomplished our “duty” to God by dressing in our Sunday best and warming a bench each week. This sort of behavior exposes a lack of faith and dependence on the All Mighty and leads to vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

In Matthew 15:1-20, Jesus severely scolds the Pharisees for elevating the traditions of their fathers above the Law of God. Throughout the ages they had recorded the comments and interpretations of their elders and had rejected some of the basic tenets of the Law as given to Moses. Jesus consistently taught that conviction of the heart would ultimately reveal itself whether pure or corrupt. Neither obedience nor worship is a checklist to be marked then forgotten. Our obedience is daily and continuous. Faith is built upon and strengthened by use (Hebrews 5:14). Repentance is demanded along the way on an “as-needed” basis (1 John 1:9). Our daily actions either confess Christ as our Lord or deny Him. The Pharisees were denying God by rejecting His Law in favor of their own edited version.

It is not enough to have Christian parents who were teachers of the way of Truth. It is not enough to merely accept their belief system. Every Christian is personally responsible for defending the beliefs that they hold by searching the scriptures for the divinely inspired and supplied will of God. The positions of my parents may or may not be scripturally valid: I alone am responsible for applying God’s Truths as He has provided and living in accordance with His will.

The Pharisees spent so much time projecting an appearance of piety that they neglected their true service to God. Let us use the opportunities that God gives us to glorify Him by purifying our hearts for real service.

ALLAN DANIEL
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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Does God require Christians to observe the Sabbath day?

ANSWER: Note to whom the Sabbath law was given:

And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day. (Deu. 5:15)

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. (Exo. 31:16)

Note that the Sabbath WAS NOT GIVEN to ANYONE prior to the Israelites.

Genesis 2:2-3 informs us that GOD observed the seventh day of His creation week.

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

The Sabbath was not observed by MAN until God gave it to Israel 2,500 years later at the leaving of Egypt. Not ONE reference to Sabbath being observed earlier by MAN. Being mentioned in Genesis 2:2-3 was simply Moses writing 2,500 years later of something he was acquainted with, for God had by then given the Sabbath to Israel and likened it to His Own rest after creation. Compare to Eve being called "mother" before she was (Gen. 3:20). Compare to Judas being referred to as betrayer before he actually betrayed Jesus (Mark 3:19, Luke 6:16, John 6:71).

In the New Testament, there are several references to Sabbath.

- *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, (Act 13:14-16)*
- *For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. (Act 15:21)*
- *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. (Act 16:13)*
- *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (Act 17:1-3)*

- *And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. (Act 18:4 KJV)*

In EVERY such instance the early disciples went on the Sabbath where those were gathered to whom the gospel might be taught - NEVER in observance of the Sabbath. Colossians 2:16 says, "*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the SABBATH days.*" Turn to Galatians 3:19 for Paul to conclude, "*Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, TILL THE SEED SHOULD COME to whom the promise was made.*" That SEED was Jesus Christ, and the Ten Commandment Law served until God's purpose was fulfilled in Him.

HARRY COBB
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GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES

PLACE

SPEAKER

Feb
3-5

Taylor's Cross Roads
Roanoke, AL

Dana Johnson
Newnan, GA

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Genesis alluded to a race of giants which existed before the Great Flood. What were they called? MIGHTY MEN OF OLD (Genesis 6:4)
2. According to Ezra, what two prophets were involved in getting the temple project going again? HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH (Ezra 5:1)
3. In Proverbs, Solomon says what goes before destruction? PRIDE (Proverbs 16:18)
4. What reason did Luke give for Judas' betrayal of Jesus? SATAN ENTERED JUDAS (Luke 22:3)
5. What happened at Troas to a young man named Eutychus? HE FELL ASLEEP WHILE PAUL WAS PRECHING AND FELL OUT OF A WINDOW (Acts 20:9)

and remember last month's questions?

1. What were the seven nations in the promised land that God assured the Israelites He would defeat? THE HITTITES, GIRGASHITES, AMORITES, CANAANITES, PERIZZITES, HIVITES, AND JEBUSITES (Deuteronomy 7:1)
2. When Elisha was on his way to Bethel, he pronounced a curse on some youths from the city; many of them were mauled by bears as a result. Why did he curse them? THEY MADE FUN OF HIM FOR BEING BALD (II Kings 2:23)
3. In the book of Isaiah, what did Isaiah use in chapter 5 as an allegory to represent the people of Judah and their God? A VINEYARD (Isaiah 5:1-7)
4. According to John's Gospel account, who followed Peter into the tomb? THE OTHER DISCIPLE (John 20:8)
5. Peter reminded his readers that one day with the lord is like what? IS LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS (II Peter 3:8)

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As we have begun the New Year, we would like to thank those who have contributed to publishing THE HARVESTER during 2011. First of all, we thank God for the gift of His Son and for the health and prosperity with which we have been blessed during 2011 and into 2012. We thank those contributing articles and those helping with the production and distribution of this publication. We thank Ken Cobb who diligently sends address updates to the mailing list, and West Georgia Printing and Yarbrough Printing for working with us to get each issue printed. We thank the congregations of West Broad Street, Valley and Napoleon for financial contributions. We thank the following individuals who have contributed financially during 2011: Denson Dunlap, Winton Carson, J.P. Cook, Fred and Joann Melton, Richard and Linda Smith, Brad Prince, and Daniel Shirey.

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If anyone has an edifying article to submit to the paper, we would greatly appreciate it. Also, please do not forget to send your gospel meeting announcements at least two months in advance to ensure it is published

in time. Continue to pray for us and our efforts. “Now the God of peace be with you all” (Rom. 15:33).

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