

**The Spirit of the Pharisees #3**  
**Conflict Over Working On The Sabbath**  
**By Bill Denton**

**INTRODUCTION**

**A. In January 1973, right after getting married, I was stationed in Misawa, Japan**

1. From the point of view of spiritual growth, it was one of the best things to happen to me
2. I discovered a group of Christians meeting together and quickly became part of that group
3. One of the first questions was, "How long have you been a Christian?"
4. I answered, about seven years; they responded, "Great, none of us have been Christians more than 2 years. You can answer all our questions!"
5. There are times in life when you immediately recognize that you're in over your head - this was one of them
6. When I tried to answer questions based on what I had heard preachers say, or my Sunday School teacher, they would smile and say, "Yes, but what does the Bible say?"
7. It was that one, repeated question that continually brought me back to God's word, and not what others said

**B. Several years ago, I sat in a group of preachers listening to a rather one-sided discussion of a current hot topic in our brotherhood**

1. I really didn't have much to say because I was mostly listening to people who seemed to have all the answers
2. Finally, somebody asked what I thought, and I replied that on that topic I generally asked people to read the very few biblical passages dealing with the subject and to then make up their minds what they believed God wanted
3. I was shocked when the guy with all the answers basically told me that wasn't good enough, that I really needed to insist that people adopt the view of one of his favorite authors who dealt with the questions involved in his book
4. I guess I was amazed that I needed that brother's book in addition (or maybe instead of!) the Bible

**C. Our brotherhood has not handled well the issue of differing opinions on what the Bible teaches on a wide variety of subjects**

1. Perhaps the main reason that we have been plagued with divisions is because of this one thing - the inability to allow variety of opinions while maintaining unity
2. The surprising thing about this is that this same kind of thing is what drove the Restoration Movement in its early days
3. Thomas Campbell's, "Declaration and Address"
  - a. Prop. 2. That although the church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies, locally separate one from another; yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them to the glory of God. And for this purpose, they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

- b. Prop. 3. That in order to this, nothing ought to be inculcated upon christians as articles of faith; nor required of them as terms of communion; but what is expressly taught, and enjoined upon them, in the word of God. Nor ought any thing be admitted, as of divine obligation, in their church constitution and managements, but what is expressly enjoined by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the New Testament church; either in express terms, or by approved precedent.
- c. Prop. 5. That with respect to the commands and ordinances of our Lord Jesus Christ, where the scriptures are silent, as to the express time or manner of performance, if any such there be; no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency, by making laws for the church; nor can any thing more be required of christians in such cases, but only that they so observe these commands and ordinances, as will evidently answer the declared and obvious end of their institution. Much less has any human authority power to impose new commands or ordinances upon the church, which our Lord Jesus Christ has not enjoined. Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the church; or be made a term of communion amongst christians, that is not as old as the New Testament.
- d. Prop. 6. That although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word: yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men; but in the power and veracity of God--therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession.

D. Despite that reasonable idea, coming out of a period in history when denominational factions warred against each other, mostly because of humanly deduced doctrines and opinions, we have created the very kind of division that the early Restoration Movement leaders tenaciously fought against

- 1. In other words, the spirit of the Pharisees still reigns
- 2. We need to see how Jesus conflicted with the Pharisees over the very issue of binding human interpretations

## I. CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

### A. Working on the Sabbath

- 1. Ex 20:8-11 -- Israel was instructed to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy; work six days and rest on the seventh
  - a. That was the law, but it comes without further explanation to explain what was work and what wasn't
  - b. Pharisees had defined work in every conceivable possibility
  - c. The issue was never about working on the Sabbath, it was about what was or was not permissible

2. Mt 12:1-14 is a classic example of conflict between Jesus and Pharisees
  - a. Matthew 12:1-14 1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." 9 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. NASB95
  - b. Note the Pharisees accusation: Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath
  - c. Problem: Find that in the Law -- it's actually the Pharisees interpretation which, to them, was equivalent to the Law
  
3. Jesus didn't agree with them at all
  - a. Pharisee's interpretation didn't take all things into consideration - David and his men eating the consecrated bread
  - b. Have you ever noticed that the priests work on the Sabbath?
  - c. Quoting Hosea, Jesus said if they had understood the prophet of God they would have had sympathy instead of condemnation for his disciples
  
4. The same kind of things were true regarding healing the man on the Sabbath
  - a. Even Pharisees allowed exceptions to the work rule on the Sabbath (rescuing domesticated animals; defending oneself from attack by an enemy; saving belongings from a house fire)
  - b. Jesus thought it permissible to care for human needs, so it was right to do good (healing a man) on the Sabbath because a man was more valuable than a sheep

5. What Jesus really thought
  - a. Matthew 15:8-9 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. NASB95
  - b. They had lost the heart of God while believing they were so right that their words were equal to God's words

**B. Keep the real issue in mind**

1. Jesus and Pharisees agreed on the authority of the written law
2. Jesus and Pharisees would have agreed that keeping the Sabbath day holy was important
3. The issue was not that working on the Sabbath was wrong
4. The whole problem was the inflexible concept of work based on faulty and limited human thinking while considering that concept equal to God's word
5. Every generation of people must wrestle with this same problem for we are prone to think that our conclusions must be right and nobody else could possibly be right!

**II. WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST THE SPIRIT OF THE PHARISEES**

**A. Some might wonder why we should bother trying to correctly understand God's word**

1. After all, if trying to be right puts us in danger of thinking like Pharisees, then why bother?
2. But the problem isn't with searching for correct understanding, or even arriving at convincing conclusions
3. The problem is binding on others what is really our conclusions, not God's word
4. The difficulty is seeing how our "correct" conclusions isn't God's word

**B. David Chadwell (Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees, p. 74f) reminds us of this struggle in the recent past**

1. There was a time when many Christians believed it was worldly and sinful to attend any movie
2. Playing cards or other games was sinful, and you couldn't even own a deck of cards
3. Many Christians regarded any laughing, joking or other form of merriment as worldly and unbecoming of a Christian
4. Some Christians still believe these things, but certainly not all
5. The real problem begins when we attempt to bind and demand that everyone accept and conform to the rules without really understanding why something is wrong

**C. Pieces of evidence showing promotion of the "rules" but not the understanding**

1. Proof-texting -- using a passage of scripture out of context to defend one's conclusions
  - a. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 16Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17If any man destroys the

temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. NASB95

- b. That passage has been used to attack everything from smoking to drinking to drug use, etc.
  - c. In context, that passage deals not with individual Christians, but with the church as a whole, and it is a warning against anyone who would destroy the church by dividing it into warring camps
  - d. 1 Cor 6:19-20 does teach that the individual Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but the problem there is sexual immorality
  - e. The point is simply that texts are sometimes used to make a point that scripture doesn't make
  - f. Does that mean we're always wrong to do that -- No, but we must distinguish between what we have concluded and what God has actually said - because another person may or may not see how we got our conclusion
2. Faulty standards of righteousness or faithfulness
    - a. I know churches where the standard of faithfulness is based on church attendance, conformance to a locally acceptable dress code, and the fact that a person does not drink or dance - but they can be dishonest in business, materialistic, and unloving people
    - b. Interestingly, church attendance, dress codes, dancing and drinking require conclusions drawn from scripture, while honesty, materialism, and love are based on clear teachings of scripture
    - c. How is it that we accept one as a standard of faithfulness but not the other?

**D. We would do well to revive some of the early guides to the Restoration Movement**

1. "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent"
  - a. I challenge you to notice something -- almost all of our conflicts and contentions are over things the Bible doesn't directly address
  - b. In other words, we often have a lot to say where the Bible never speaks, and too little to say where the Bible really does speak
2. "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things love"
  - a. Where is the arena of opinion? Does it really exist?
  - b. And if it is permissible to hold opinions, must I demand that you hold every opinion I hold to be faithful to God
  - c. The problem with Phariseeism is that it puts us too much into the area of watchdogging everybody else and too little time working on my own faithfulness

## CONCLUSION

### A. Phariseeism originally rose out of a zeal for God's word and a desire to obey God's law

1. That is not wrong - every Christian ought to do the best he or she can do know and follow God's will
2. The mistake is made when our zeal becomes an excuse for determining everybody else's faith

### B. Let's learn from the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees

1. The fact that these conflicts are recorded is a great benefit to us
2. They help us understand both the nature of personal faith, and the correct way to relate to others of faith

### C. Invitation