

**The Spirit of the Pharisees #4**  
**Jesus' Condemnation of Pharisees**  
**By Bill Denton**

**INTRODUCTION**

**A. We've been talking about Pharisees for the past three Sundays**

1. They began as ardent nationalists who took it upon themselves to educate Israel in the scriptures and the Law of Moses
2. They were defenders of the nation against all enemies, often at great risk, including death
3. Their goal was to keep the Law as well as it could possibly be kept
4. In all honesty, there are numerous reasons why we should think highly of Pharisees, be impressed at their efforts to follow God's will, and marvel at their dedication
5. But by the time Jesus arrived on the scene, the Pharisees had degenerated into the very thing they fought against - in their effort to follow God, they had replaced God with themselves

**B. The Pharisees provided to Jesus a great opportunity to contrast man's religion to God's word and God's will**

1. Those direct conflicts were not mere technical disagreements, they were substantive issues marking the great difference between Jesus and that which claimed to be religious
2. The conflicts themselves help us understand the true will of God

**C. In this fourth lesson, we're going to look at the 23rd chapter of Matthew**

1. In a series of lesson on Pharisees, it is impossible to skip this one
2. This chapter is one of the longest sustained condemnation of a religious people found anywhere, and it is vital to understanding the problem of the Pharisees

**I. THE TRUTH ABOUT PHARISEES (MT 23:1-12)**

**A. Verses 1-12 is a section in which Jesus was telling the crowds and his disciples why they needed to be careful with the Pharisees**

1. Matthew 16:6-12 6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? 11 "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. NASB95

2. The scribes and Pharisees had seated themselves in the seat of Moses (authorities on the Law), but Jesus knew that the teachings of Pharisees were dangerous; it was wise to know that and beware of thinking of Pharisees as infallibly righteous

**B. He noted several problems with Pharisees**

1. 23:3 -- they are inconsistent and untrustworthy: they don't do what they tell others to do
2. 23:4 -- they are spiritually lazy: they put burdens on others but won't carry the same load
3. 23:5 -- they have the wrong motives: they do what they do just to be noticed by others
4. 23:6-7 -- they seek the rewards of honor and position: banquets, synagogues, market places - they want to be acknowledged

**C. Jesus warned against such things as being carried away with titles and trappings because it is the opposite of the servant position that disciples are called to fill**

1. Can you remember that the route to exaltation is through humility - that's counter to the way of the world
2. It is also counter to the way of the Pharisees

**II. EIGHT WOES AGAINST PHARISEES (MT 23:13-39)**

- A. **Matthew 23:13** 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. NASB95
  1. The Pharisees shut off the kingdom of heaven from seekers
  2. The Pharisees themselves were not entering the kingdom
    - a. They rejected the Messiah
    - b. They preferred their own traditions over God's word
    - c. They chose worldly ways over spiritual ways
  3. When they led others, they didn't lead them to God, but to themselves, thereby shutting the door to the kingdom
- B. **Matthew 23:14** 14 ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation."] NASB95
  1. The Pharisees used religion to feed their greed
  2. It is unclear exactly how this happened, but in some way, Pharisees took advantage of the livelihood of widows to fund their own projects
  3. Scripture is full of passages promoting the care of widows, not the abuse of widows, and the Pharisees turned that around for their own gain
- C. **Matthew 23:15** 15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. NASB95
  1. The Pharisees doubly corrupted new converts
  2. Make no mistake, Pharisees were what we would call "evangelistic"

3. But they were missionaries of a false religion, so their converts were doubly corrupted; once by being separated from God, but twice by following an empty and false religion
- D. **Matthew 23:16** 16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ NASB95
1. Pharisees twisted oaths and vows in order to deceive people
  2. They developed an intricate, complicated system of swearing; some you could trust and some you couldn't
  3. The only possible purpose was to deceive others; truth, honesty, trustworthiness, etc., are meaningless in such systems
- E. **Matthew 23:23** 23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. NASB95
1. Pharisees stressed the lighter commands but ignored the weightier commands
  2. They tithed their herbs and spices, but neglected things like justice, mercy and faithfulness
  3. Religious busy-work became a substitute for real issues of human life seeking to follow God's will?
- F. **Matthew 23:25-26** 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. NASB95
1. Pharisees misunderstood real spiritual cleanliness
  2. They focused on externals while the real problems were internal
  3. Real spiritual cleanliness begins on the inside and move outward, not the other way around
- G. **Matthew 23:27-28** 27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 “So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. NASB95
1. They ignored the real problem: appearance of religion does not change the reality of being dead within
  2. Looking good on the outside can never do anything about sin on the inside
  3. Pharisees had fallen prey to the trap of appearances over substance
- H. **Matthew 23:29-33** 29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 “Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? NASB95

1. Pharisees shared the guilt of their fathers in rejecting and even killing the messengers of God
2. These are harsh words, condemning words, that puts the Pharisees into the company of people they would have never chosen as friends
3. It was the Pharisees who openly sought ways to kill Jesus, just like other Jews would have rejected, persecuted, and even killed the prophets of God

## CONCLUSION

### A. If you think Jesus only condemned the Pharisees, you would be wrong

1. His condemnation was turned into a lament over the state of God's people and what he knew was about to happen to them
2. Matthew 23:37-39 37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' " NASB95
3. Even Pharisees, who generated the harshest and most condemning words from Jesus, also got his pity and sorrow because of their sins

### B. I wonder if we realize how much like Pharisees we can still be today?

1. Would we ever be guilty of shutting off the kingdom by promoting the traditions of men over the word and will of God?
2. Would we ever use religion to feed our greed?
3. Would we ever doubly corrupt new converts by causing them to follow an empty and useless religion?
4. Would we ever twist truth and honesty in a game of deception?
5. Would we ever get tangled up in minor things and ignore major things?
6. Would we ever misunderstand spiritual cleanliness?
7. Would we ever get caught up in the appearance of religion while being dead inside?
8. Would we reject the messengers of God?

### C. Those eight woes against Pharisees ought to give us some serious things to think about

1. The spirit of the Pharisees is not dead
2. Far too often, we find in ourselves, at least in principle, the very things Jesus condemned in Pharisees
3. Let's learn and then let's do the hard work of being different from them

### D. Heaven's call