

hell, and sons of Satan, and those who follow them and speak peace to them fall into the pit with them.

In contrast to the modern-day Pharisees and their followers, true Christians are ones who boast in Christ and Him crucified and no other, meaning that they believe that Christ's work ensured the salvation of all whom He represented and is the only thing that makes the difference between salvation and damnation. They know that their own efforts form absolutely no part of their acceptance before God. They rest in Christ alone as their only hope, knowing that it is the work of Christ by the grace of God that makes them to differ. They know that if they were judged by their best efforts, they would be justly punished in hell. They know that Christ's imputed righteousness is the only way they are counted righteous before God. They judge by essential gospel doctrine. They realize, as Paul did in Philippians 3:4-9, that their former self-righteous religion, even their outward blamelessness (v.6), was nothing but dung. They count their former self-righteous religion to be loss because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord (v. 8). They realize that when they were without this KNOWLEDGE, they were going about to establish a righteousness of their own. They will never say that they remained ignorant of the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ as the only ground of salvation after they were regenerated. They will never say that they believed in salvation conditioned on the sinner after they were regenerated; thus, they will never say that they believed in universal atonement after they were regenerated. They realize that all this false doctrine evidenced lostness.

The next time you hear someone accuse someone else (or accuse you) of being a Pharisee, keep these things in mind. Is it a true or a false accusation? It is a true accusation if you condition your salvation in any way to any degree on yourself (which is always the case if you believe that Jesus Christ died for everyone without exception), thus judging by outward appearance, morality, reputation, zeal, or anything else but essential gospel doctrine. It is a false accusation if you believe that your salvation is conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone, thus judging by essential gospel doctrine.

- by Marc D. Carpenter

*True Gospel Publications
P.O. Box 995
West Rutland, VT 05777
U.S.A.*

www.outsidethecamp.org

What is a Pharisee?

“He’s a Pharisee.” “You’re being so Pharisaical.” “She’s caught up in Pharisaism.” These kinds of accusations are regularly thrown at people who are stricter than the accuser in their judgments of saved and lost. The liberal calls a person who judges all non-Christians to be unregenerate a Pharisee. The mainstream church-goer calls the fundamentalist a Pharisee. The one who judges all professing Christians to be regenerate calls the one who judges some or most professing Christians to be unregenerate a Pharisee. The antinomian calls the legalist a Pharisee. And on and on it goes – Pharisee this, Pharisee that.

Do any of these people know what they’re talking about? Who were the Pharisees of Jesus Christ’s time, and who are their modern-day equivalents? Let us find out the truth.

At the time Jesus Christ walked the earth, the Pharisees were the “conservative party” within Judaism. They held very strictly to the Torah and the Talmud and were very outwardly moral. They were the leaders of the majority of the Jews, mostly the “common people.” They were revered by their followers for their religious zeal and dedication, and they were held up as models worthy of imitation. Their main opposition was the party of the Sadducees, who were the “liberal party” within Judaism. They did not believe that the damned will be punished eternally in hell and that the saved will dwell eternally in heaven. The Sadducees were popular among the high-class minority.

The first time we see mention of the Pharisees is John the Baptizer’s condemnation of them and the Sadducees in Matthew 3:7-10: “*But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. And do not think to say within yourselves, We have a father, Abraham. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. But already the axe is even laid at the root of the trees; therefore, any tree not bringing forth good fruit is cut off and is thrown into fire.*” Why would John the Baptizer say that the Pharisees, who were outwardly moral, zealous, and religious, were the offspring of vipers? Why would he say that they had not brought forth good fruit? Isn’t obedience to the law good fruit? Who was he to judge the hearts of these religious people? Wasn’t he being too harsh with them? Couldn’t he have used more temperate language? Was “offspring of vipers” really necessary? Isn’t that mean and unloving? How did he expect to gain an audience with such language? Didn’t he know that one catches more flies with honey than with vinegar? And what was he

for” in Hebrews 2:17 (KJV: “*make reconciliation for*”). The self-righteous religionists will almost inevitably point to the tax collector to defend their heresy that newly regenerated persons do not necessarily know about the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ. They’ll ask, “How much did the publican know?” The Bible tells us how much he knew. He knew that he did not have a righteousness that answered the demands of God’s law and justice, and he knew about propitiation, which is God’s wrath being appeased. And from Romans 10:1-4, we know that he was submitted to the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, which is God’s justifying the ungodly while remaining just through the propitiatory sacrifice and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. How much did the publican know? He knew what ALL Christians know – that salvation is by the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Christ alone.

“I say to you, This one went down to his house having been justified, [rather] than that one. For everyone exalting himself will be humbled. And the [one] humbling himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14). The Pharisee was one who exalted himself. He boasted in himself. Whatever one thinks makes the difference between salvation and damnation is what one boasts in. The Pharisee thought that his own deeds, which he thanked God for, made the difference. If anyone is justified by works, they have a boast, but not with God (Romans 4:2). The tax collector was one who humbled himself. He had no boast in himself. He knew that there was nothing he could do or be enabled to do that would make the difference between salvation and damnation. He knew that it was the work of Christ alone that made the difference. He boasted in the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). Belief in the true gospel excludes boasting in self (Romans 3:27).

We have seen the damnable doctrine of the Pharisees. Jesus Christ showed the depth of wickedness of this soul-murdering doctrine when he said, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you go about the sea and the dry [land] to make one proselyte; and when he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).* The Pharisees were zealous to proselytize, but by converting to the self-righteous religion of the Pharisees, the proselytes were worse off than even the proselytizers. It is important to note that not only the leaders but also the followers of the Pharisees were wicked: *“Leave them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind; and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14).* Anyone who looked up to the Pharisees thinking they were “the best of the best” were also ignorant of the only ground of salvation and acceptance before God. They judged the Pharisees saved not based on essential gospel doctrine but by outward appearance, morality, and reputation. This refutes the notion that those who preach a false gospel are lost but those who are deceived by a false gospel

They did not make their judgments based on Scripture; instead, they made them based on their own (and their fathers’) vain imaginations.

How are we to know what their doctrine was? Earlier, Jesus said, *“Then surely from their fruits you shall know them” (Matthew 7:20).* What are these fruits by which we know them? *“For each tree is known from [its] own fruit. For they do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. The good man brings forth good out of the good treasure of his heart. And the evil man brings forth evil out of the evil treasure of his heart, for his mouth speaks out of the abundance of his heart” (Luke 6:43-44).* The fruit is what his mouth speaks, and his mouth speaks what is in his heart. We know what the doctrine of the Pharisees was by what doctrine they confessed with their mouths. And the doctrine they confessed with their mouths was the doctrine they believed in their hearts.

What was the doctrine that the Pharisees confessed and taught? Luke 18:9 gives us the very heart of Pharisaism: *“And He also spoke this parable to some of those relying on themselves, that they are righteous, and despising the rest.”* Here is Pharisaism in all its wickedness. First, the Pharisees *“relied on themselves, that they are righteous.”* The Greek word for “relied on” also means “trusted in” or “had confidence in.” They trusted in themselves – they had confidence in themselves – that they were righteous. They believed that their own works – their doing what God commands and their abstaining from what God forbids – were what gained and maintained God’s favor and recommended them to God. They believed that their justification, their sanctification, their perseverance, and their entitlement to heaven, were conditioned on themselves. They believed that one’s own righteousness is what makes the difference between heaven and hell. This is the epitome of self-righteousness.

Romans 10:2-3 describes the Pharisees well: *“For I testify to them that they have a zeal to God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.”* What needs to be noted first is that this is not just describing Pharisees; it is describing all the self-righteous Jews, and, by extension, all self-righteous religionists. But the Pharisees epitomized self-righteousness. They certainly were zealous. Yet their zeal was not according to KNOWLEDGE. Without KNOWLEDGE of certain doctrines, one’s zeal is nothing but an abomination to God. What essential knowledge were these people ignorant of? They were ignorant of THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. This righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). It is the righteousness that shows God to

doing lumping them in with the Sadducees, who didn't even believe in an afterlife? (You can hear the "tolerant Calvinists" now, can't you?)

John the Baptizer was absolutely correct in his condemnation of the Pharisees, in calling them truthful names, and in lumping them in with the Sadducees. In fact, Jesus Christ reserved His harshest words for them as well. And those of us who are Christians should follow the examples of John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ. Away with the spineless, nonjudgmental drivel of God-hating fools.

Before we Christians can follow the example of John the Baptizer and Jesus Christ, we must know the reason why these moral, religious, zealous people must be judged to be lost. We do not judge people to be lost because of a feeling or a mystical "discernment." We judge people to be lost based on specific evidence in Scripture.

In Matthew 16:6, Jesus Christ warned the disciples, "*Watch and take heed from the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*" The Greek words for "watch" and "take heed" also mean "discern" and "beware." What were the disciples to beware of? Were they to beware of the immorality of the Pharisees and Sadducees? Were they to beware of their reputations? After a rebuke from Jesus Christ, the disciples "*knew that He did not say to take heed from the leaven of bread, but from the DOCTRINE of the Pharisees and Sadducees*" (Matthew 16:12). They were to beware of their DOCTRINE. Their DOCTRINE is what showed that they were lost.

Some people describe the Pharisees by saying, "Their doctrine was as straight as an arrow, but they just used it to beat people over the head." (This, of course, is to try to condemn those who judge a person to be lost who does not believe essential gospel doctrine.) But the passage above debunks this foolishness. The doctrine of the Pharisees was *not* "as straight as an arrow" (orthodox); it was heterodox.

In the first half of Matthew 15:9, Jesus said that the Pharisees were worshipping God in vain. Note first that they *were worshipping*. How many self-righteous religionists who come in the name of Christianity would look at a worship service of professing Christians and say something like, "Look at that worship! They're on fire for God! No unbeliever can praise God like that!" Yet Jesus said that the Pharisees worshiped *in vain*, just as many of the Israelites of old worshiped in vain. But how do we know they were worshipping in vain? Look at the second half of Matthew 15:9. We know that they were worshipping in vain because of their DOCTRINE. They were "*teaching [as] doctrines [the] precepts of men*" (Matthew 15:9b). Their doctrine was not the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Their doctrine was man-made tradition (Matthew 15:6). They did not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

might be regenerate. Followers of those who teach false doctrine are as blind as those who teach the false doctrine.

So who are the modern-day Pharisees and their followers? Are they everyone who judges another person to be unregenerate? Obviously not, or else John the Baptist and Jesus Christ would have to be judged to be Pharisees in their condemnation of the Pharisees! The other prophets and the apostles would also have to be judged to be Pharisees, since they definitely judged other people to be unregenerate. The fact is, Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit through the apostles *commands* all Christians to judge certain people to be unregenerate. The key is that the modern-day Pharisees, just as the Pharisees of old, judge by the *wrong standard*.

The blind modern-day Pharisees and their blind followers are very religious, moral, zealous people. They strive to keep God's law, and they are zealous in their religious duties. They are diligent to attend worship services. They may be missionaries or support mission work. They are hard-working, outwardly upright citizens. They keep themselves from and preach against moral evil. Thus far, this could describe any professing Christian. But these things are not what distinguish the true Christians from the modern-day Pharisees and their followers. What distinguishes them is their DOCTRINE. In addition to being moral and religious and zealous, modern-day Pharisees and their followers believe that people's own efforts, enabled by God, make the difference between salvation and damnation. They do not believe that salvation is conditioned on the work of Christ alone; instead, they believe that salvation is ultimately up to what the sinner does with (adds to) Christ's work. This includes everyone who believes that Jesus Christ's blood atoned for everyone without exception. They believe that, since Christ has done everything He could do for everyone in the whole world, it is now up to the sinner to make the difference in his destiny. They believe that those who are now burning in hell are those for whom Christ died but who failed to make use of Christ's blood and get themselves to heaven and who made Christ's blood of no effect because of their failure to secure their own salvation. They look upon the wicked people of the world thinking that what makes the difference between the wicked people and them is that they made themselves to differ by accepting the atonement that was made for everyone without exception. This includes everyone who believes that one can lose his salvation by what he does, thus believing that one can gain his salvation back by what he does. This includes everyone who judges all professing Christians who are moral to be saved, no matter what their doctrine. It all boils down to ignorance of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel – that God is both just and justifier, saving based on the work of Christ alone, to the exclusion of anything the sinner does or is enabled to do. Modern-day Pharisees are the offspring of vipers, children of

be just and justifier based on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, apart from the law (Romans 3:21-26). If anyone is ignorant of this righteousness, then he is automatically going about to establish a righteousness of his own. If he does not know that Christ's righteousness imputed is the only righteousness that God accepts, then it necessarily follows that he will think that his own righteousness is acceptable before God. Also, if anyone is ignorant of this righteousness, then he is automatically not in submission to the righteousness of God. One cannot submit to what one is ignorant of. There are many people who say, "I was ignorant of the doctrine of imputed righteousness for a time after I was saved." This is an impossibility. To be ignorant of imputed righteousness is to believe that one's own righteousness is what recommends one to God.

The Pharisees were characterized by seeking to establish their own righteousness. They trusted in themselves, that they were righteous based on their deeds of the law, and did not submit to the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel of salvation conditioned on the atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. Their doctrine was a doctrine of salvation conditioned on the sinner.

The last part of Luke 18:9 says that the Pharisees were "*despising the rest.*" This follows from their self-righteous doctrine. Since they believed that their own law-keeping recommended them to God, then they must have believed that the law-breakers were not in favor with God. "But wait a minute," a reader might say, "it is *true* that those who have no regard for God's law are not in favor with God." The reader is correct. Those who have no regard for God's law are unregenerate. But what was it in the Pharisees' doctrine that made their judgment of law-breakers wicked? It was their *hypocrisy*. They judged others to be unrighteous because the others were not keeping the law, yet *they* were judging *themselves* to be *righteous* because of their own *law-keeping*. They thought that their own law-keeping satisfied God's demand for righteousness. They did not realize that *they too* were unregenerate because *they too* did not have a righteousness that satisfied God's demand. They were sinners just like the rest, they were deserving of hell just like the rest, but they did not know it. Their standard was the wrong standard. They did not know that the standard was perfect righteousness, both externally and internally. Jesus Christ exposed their wickedness in the woes of Matthew 23 and Luke 11, showing that they were no more righteous than the ones they were condemning.

In John 8:3-11, the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who was caught committing adultery. They said to Jesus Christ, "*Teacher, this woman was taken in the very act, committing adultery. And in the Law, Moses commanded that such should be stoned. You, then, what do You say?*" (vv. 4-5). Jesus Christ, exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees,

said, "*The [one] among you without sin, let him cast the first stone at her*" (v. 7). Many self-righteous religionists use this passage, as well as Matthew 7:1-2 and Romans 2:1, to claim that no one is to judge another. But in all these passages, God is talking about *hypocritical* judging. The Pharisees self-righteously brought this woman to be stoned as a wicked law-breaker, yet they were wicked law-breakers themselves. They were just as much void of the righteousness that God requires as the woman caught in adultery. "*The [one] saying not to commit adultery, do you commit adultery? The [one] detesting idols, do you rob temples? [You] who boast in Law, do you dishonor God through transgression of the Law?*" (Romans 2:22-23).

The Pharisees self-righteously, hypocritically despised all others who did not meet the same standard of law-keeping that they met. They would not even eat with the tax collectors and other sinners, because they were so self-righteously aloof: "*And their scribes and the Pharisees murmured at His disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And answering, Jesus said to them, Those who are sound have no need of a healer, but those badly having [illness]. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Luke 5:31-32). Here, Jesus showed that the Pharisees thought that they were already righteous by their law-keeping and had no need for repentance. He showed that only those who were sinners in need of a healer, who do not have a righteousness in themselves that answers God's demands or recommends them to God, who do not deserve to be in fellowship with God, are the ones He came to call to repentance.

This is illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. "*The Pharisee [was] standing, praying these things to himself: God, I thank You that I am not as the rest of men, rapacious, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice [on] the sabbath; I tithe all things, as many as I get*" (Luke 18:11-12). The Pharisee thanked God that he was not one of those sinners he so despised and that he was zealous to keep the law, even over and above what most do. Notice that the Pharisee attributed his status to God! He thanked God for enabling him to be righteous! He thanked God for enabling him to meet up to the standard that he believed God required! Any belief in salvation conditioned on the sinner, *even if God enables the person to meet the condition*, is an abomination to God.

"*And standing at a distance, the tax collector would not even lift up [his] eyes to Heaven, but smote on his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner!*" (Luke 18:13). The tax collector is put in stark contrast with the Pharisee. Instead of thanking God for enabling him to meet the condition for acceptance before God, the tax collector knew that he could not meet the condition or be enabled to meet the condition and begged for mercy. He knew where mercy is found. The Greek word for "be merciful" is the same word that is translated "*make propitiation*