**Surpassing the *“Righteousness”* of the Pharisees,Matt.5:20**

1Cor.10:6,11 emphasize that events of ancient history are preserved in the biblical record *“as examples for us”* and are *“written for our instruction”* to prevent our falling into the same pitfalls of disobedience and sin.

Last week I mentioned, somewhat in passing, two Jewish sects that were prevalent during and immediately following Jesus’ time upon the earth. They were: ***Sadducees****,* who did not believe in *angels, spirits,* or *resurrection,* Acts 23:8. 4:1-2; and, ***Pharisees****,* who acknowledged all three. To these two we could also add the ***Essenes****,* who believed a form of *dualism* in which unrighteous souls are punished, while righteous ones pass into other bodies- perhaps at a general resurrection (*Wars of the Jews,* 2.163; Josephus). What’s the point? *Now* as *then,* men divided themselves into socio/economic/religious groups, each believing themselves *right* and all others *wrong.*

So today, we have:

* Those who believe, like the ***Sadducees****,* that there is no afterlife; that the *corporal* form of man is all there is, 1Cor.15:12; Acts 17:32; and therefore, that whatever *rewards* or *punishments* we experience are all composed and completed in the *here* and *now.*
* Those who believe, like the ***Pharisees****,* that they have all the right answers to all the right questions in religion, Mark 7:1-5; view others with contempt, Luke 18:9; and see themselves as *seated in the chair of Christ* (rather than *Moses* as previously, cf. Matt.23:2) as *Law-giver,* John 12:48.
* Those who believe, like the ***Essenes****,* that although the *spirit* of the good and righteous lives on after death, it does so by being *reincarnated* into another form (some think another *person,* and others imagine inhabiting an *animal, plant,* or some other *material* thing)… and/or every other idea imaginable.
* We could also outline the basic beliefs of the ***Epicureans, Stoics, Zealots, Herodians, etc.***  but surely the point is made: **History repeats itself… even in the ways, means, and motives that we devise to divide ourselves.**

But if I were to ask (and I have done so many times before), **“Which of these *sects* do we most resemble?”** how would you respond? **“The Pharisees”** is invariably the response. **Why, do you suppose?**

Perhaps primarily because although the Pharisees took things much too far, and failed miserably to have good/right attitudes, they were *sticklers for truth-* or at least what they perceived to be “truth,” Phil.3:4b-6; Acts 22:3; 26:5.

**However, let’s also consider more specifically the *charges* proffered against the Pharisees by Jesus in Matt.23 (in hopes of avoiding the same condemnations, since we admit we *resemble* them):**

1. **They *say* and *do not,* vv.2-4;** we must instead *prove ourselves “doers of the word”* rather than *“merely hearers who delude themselves,”* Jas.1:22;
2. **They *do all their deeds* to be *noticed,* vv.5-12;** reasons matter- therefore we must not even *let our left hand know what our right hand is doing,* Matt.6:3-4;
3. **They *shut off the king of heaven,* v.13;** there are so many ways we can “turn off” others from Christ/Christianity; what say/don’t say; what we do/don’t do; our thoughts, emotions, words, and actions (and what we *like, share*, and *post* on social media) reflect Christ and His way, Matt.5:13-16; Phil.3:14-15; Col.4:5-6;
4. **They *devour widow’s houses,* v.14;** we must not prey on the weak, and take advantage of the helpless, but instead *help, encourage,* and *be patient,* 1Thess.5:14; and *strengthen* the *weak* and *feeble,* Heb.12:12-13;
5. **They *make proselytes* (instead of *disciples*), v.15;** we must endeavor to *“make disciples”* of *Christ* with *His Word,* rather than *ourselves* and our *ideas* and *ideology,* Matt.28:19-20;
6. **They practice *‘loophole logic/Christianity,* vv.16-22;** we must be *without guile* like *Nathanael,* John 1:47; and not only *speak truth* always*,* Matt.5:33-37, but make every effort to *practice what we preach,* Luke 6:35;
7. **They *neglect the weightier provisions of justice, mercy,* and *faithfulness,* vv.23-24;** we must strive to *“do all the things which are commanded,”* Luke 17:10, we will be just *“unworthy slaves”* who have done *only “that which we ought,”* but we won’t have to worry about which are the “big” and “little” commandments (or sins!)… or *gnats* and *camels;*  however, if it is *unjust, unmerciful,* and *faithless,* it is always wrong, and it is never wrong to be *just, merciful,* and *faithful;*
8. **They *clean the outside of the cup* or *tomb/sepulcher* (the part *others see*), vv.25-28;** this coincides with **vv.5-12** regarding *doing to be noticed by others* and being *overly concerned with how others see/perceive* and *treat you;* it is “image” Christianity rather than *obedience from the heart* and *true commitment* to *truth,* Rom.6:17; we must *clean* ourselves from the *inside* to the *outside* (mind/heart to life) rather than the other way around, Matt.15:18-20; and,
9. **They *think they’re better than their forefathers,* vv.29-38**; we must **become** better than our forefathers- whether *Essene, Sadducee,* or *Pharisee;* but such begins with admitting our faults and failures rather than hiding, excusing, or justifying them as we’ve seen exemplified here in our text; Rom.3:23 is still true and applies to us also; we must *listen to* and *heed* the *prophets, wise men,* and *scribes* who bring us God’s Word instead of *persecuting* them, cf.v.34; we must break the pattern of history repeating itself.

**Conclusion / Take-Home Points:**

* **Yes, in general terms, the *Sadducees* were wrong *doctrinally,* the *Pharisees* were wrong *morally,* and the *Essenes* were wrong in *both* ways; but,**
* **We can learn from their *negative examples* and do better… we can *know the truth* AND *practice it* both *from the heart* and *for the right reasons!***
* **Are you/we *willing,* v.37?**
* **If not, *our house* will also be *left desolate,* v.38. Let’s not only *do* better, let’s *be* better by thinking, feeling, and doing *right!***