

## Am I A Pharisee?

TEXT: Luke 15:1-2

### Introduction

The Pharisees were condemned more severely by Christ than any other group in the Gospels (Matthew 23:3-30). I don't know of any one that would attempt to defend them today. Yet the Pharisees were not conscious of their spiritual condition.

We may have their spirit without being conscious of it, "for I say unto you that unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

The Pharisees were the ones who provoked the parables of Luke 15, yet that point is never mentioned. Let's study them that we may avoid being like them.

### The Characteristic of the Pharisees

1. The Pharisees were critical of Christ. In the text they criticized Him for receiving sinners. This is but one instance and there were many other similar times (consider Luke 7:30, v.36-50, when Jesus had a meal at Simon the Pharisee's house.)

Do we not criticize Him by our refusal to follow His teaching? Do we criticize what He taught about the church (Matthew 16:18)? Do we criticize what He taught about giving (Acts 20:35)? What He taught about putting the kingdom first (Matthew 6:33)?

[Q-1 How may we be criticizing Christ? ]

2. The Pharisees were not interested in the lost. They were shocked that the Lord preferred the company of sinners to theirs. Could this be true of us today? Would Christ pass some of us by in order to try to save the lost?

[Q-2 Among what people did Jesus spend a lot of his time? ]

[Q-3 What was His mission? Luke 19:10 ]

[Q-4 Where would we expect soul-winners to spend their time?]

This parable reveals to us how that more active interest is showed toward some by the very fact that they are lost. If a member of the family is sick, that very illness creates a more active interest and concern for that member of the family. If one member of the family is weak that very weakness should cause more tender concern.

Christ uses the lost sheep, coin, and boy to justify His own action. He uses the elder brother as a mirror for the Pharisees to see themselves. The son in the field was too busy with useful labor (?) to share in the father's earnest watching for the prodigal's return. He was so busy with formality that it never dawned on him that he could please his father more by going out to look for his brother.

The services of the older brother were that like a slave and not a son (Galatians 4:6,7). What he was doing was a burden and not a joy.

The Christian that is not concerned and actively interested and engaged in trying to save the lost is a Pharisee.

3. The Pharisee did not recognize the need for forgiveness. The elder brother was angry, murmuring and complaining, yet saw nothing wrong with his life. Again consider Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:36-43 as he ate with the Lord and his attitude.

We see the sins of others and think that they ought to repent but what about our own sins? Do we feel any need of forgiveness?

4. The Pharisees were formal and ritualistic. "For ye devour widows houses, and for a pretense make long prayers" (Matthew 23:14). Notice that prayer had no meaning to the Pharisees. Did they pray for widows... and then turn right around and rob them?

We have applied Proverbs 28:9 to alien sinners, but what about us? ("He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.")

Do you pray for unity and then work toward strife and division? If so, are you not a formalist and hypocrite just like the Pharisees? Do you pray for widows and orphans and leave them to starve, go naked, and do nothing to help them find shelter? If so, are you not like the Pharisee?

In Luke 10 Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Are we like the priest and levite who go to worship, and then walk by on the other side when something needs to be done? If so, we are the Pharisee! Do we attend worship and then shut our eyes to opportunities?

[Q-5 How must our worship-life and our service-life compliment each other? ]

5. The Pharisees did things for show. "All their works they do to be seen of men" (Matthew 23:5). Why do you and I serve the Lord anyway? Am I ready to quit if I'm not appreciated for what I do? If they don't make a fuss over me and what I do, do I quit?!

Do I serve to be praised or do I serve God? Am I ready to serve anytime and anyplace regardless of how lowly the task may be? Will I do something if it will bring the praise of men, but let opportunities pass where there is no one to praise?

[Q-6 Will the Christian's self-discipline lead him to serve the Lord by serving others even when the service is not recognized? Might not the Lord reward such 'hidden' service even greater?

6. The Pharisees were long on talk and short on doing. "They say and do not" (Matthew 23:3). Can I find "a thousand things" for the church to do, but never do anything myself? Do I talk about what "the church" ought to be doing but not what "we" or "I" ought to be doing?

We say that "we follow the Bible," does our practice match our talk? Do we follow the Bible on giving? On forgiving? Or do we mean that we follow the Bible on baptism?

[Q-7 What if we make plans, or commitments to a work, but don't follow through with it? ]

7. The Pharisees were bound by tradition and custom. "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" (Matthew 15:2).

Are we bound by our customary way of doing things? Change the order of worship and some will think it is unscriptural. Are we against many things because it is not in our "custom" or "tradition".

If anything is doctrinally wrong, it is wrong in any "custom" or practice. But the "way" or "manner" of doing and accomplishing anything may vary, just so that the command is not deleted, added to, or substituted (Deuteronomy 4:2).

The command to "go" may be accomplished by car, boat, plane, walking, etc., but we must go. The command to "teach" may be by public classes, television, radio, etc., but we must teach believers to observe the Lord's word. We may partake of the "fruit of the vine" in a ceramic cup, a single glass, or multiple plastic containers, but we must partake of the fruit of the vine.

8. The Pharisees majored on minors. They gave tithes of all they had, right down to the spices in their gardens, but they omitted weightier matters (Matthew 23:23). It is not a matter of letting some things go, but a matter of doing it all!

Do we keep "some" of the commands that we deem important, and let other "matters" (that may weight more with God, Matt.23:23) go by? Do I love as I should? (I Cor. 13); Am I forgiving? Do I participate in the prayers and singing?

[Q-8 What kind of matters must Christians be careful not to overlook? How may Christians become smug and complacent? ]

9. The Pharisees hunted for things to criticize in others. They were critical of the Lord doing good on the Sabbath (Luke 6:7). They watched him closely to see whether he healed someone on the Sabbath so they might make an accusation against him. Are we 'hunting' for things to criticize?

[Q-9 How can we learn to be less critical? What effect does it have on our children and young Christians to hear constant criticism?]

### Conclusion

We usually think of the Pharisees as being a dead and forgotten class of people, but are they more alive than we wish to think? We need ask ourselves, "AM I A PHARISEE?"