

Jesus and the Pharisees

Pharisees – the set-apart / separated ones

- Believed the whole ‘Old Testament’ – Torah, Prophetic books, Writings
- Had a strong Oral Tradition, later codified in the Mishnah, 70-200 AD
- Wanted to put faith and teaching into action – very careful procedures for every aspect of life
- Jesus accepted their hospitality – Luke 7.36, 11.37, 14.1
- ‘Good’ Pharisees: Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel

Jesus and the Pharisees

What the Pharisees got right

- Took their faith seriously, and were prepared to suffer for it
- Were 'counter-cultural', rejecting assimilation into Greek pantheistic culture and worship of the Roman emperor
- Studied Scripture carefully (John 5.39) and taught it to the people
- Carefully evaluated any new teaching to make sure it was according to Scripture

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What the Pharisees got wrong

- They got the Form, but not the Content, just as the earlier Israelites had done

CONTENT - FAITH: The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can **look at it and live.**' So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and **looked** at the bronze snake, they **lived.**

Numbers 21.8-9

FORM - IDOLATRY: Hezekiah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been **burning incense to it.** (It was called Nehushtan.)

2Kings 18.4

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What the Pharisees got wrong

- They got the Text (10 Commandments), not the Context (Freedom from slavery in Egypt)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Matthew 5.17-18

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Exodus 20.2

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” Deuteronomy 5.6

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What the Pharisees got wrong

- They came to God in the pride of works, not the humility of faith

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

‘Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector (Roman collaborator). The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, the sinner.”

‘I tell you, that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’

Luke 18.9-14

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What we can learn from the Pharisees:

- Our whole lives directed towards God
- Prepared to stand up for our faith, and to live it out in daily life
- Understand the real meaning – the inner Content, not the external Form *[the bronze snake]*
- Make sure we understand the Context when we interpret the Text *[the 10 Commandments]*
- Come to God in the humility of faith, not what we assume is our own goodness *[the tax collector]*