**Keeping God’s Commandments Is Pharisaical?**

(by Kevin Heaton)

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews whom Jesus often had discussions with over matters of the law because they were trying to test Him and find fault in Him. Many today believe that the Pharisees were condemned by Jesus because they were "law-keepers" and were so concerned about obeying the law that they failed to understand the grace that God was bringing into the world through Jesus Christ. Thus, the term 'Pharisaical' is often applied today to those who would teach or stress obedience to the commandments of God in the New Testament.

But I ask you, is this right? Were the Pharisees condemned by Jesus for their "law-keeping"? Is it correct to label someone as 'Pharisaical' because they teach obedience to the commandments of God today? Consider the following:

While it is true that the Pharisees did not believe in Jesus and did not understand the grace of God, Jesus did NOT condemn them for their adherence to the law. In fact, it was the exact opposite.

Jesus even told the people to listen and OBEY what the Pharisees told them to do from the law - ***"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to His disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you'"*** (**Matthew 23:1-3a**). Jesus still proclaimed the authority and role of the scribes and Pharisees in teaching the Law of Moses to the people. He commanded the people to keep the commandments of God.

Here is what Jesus really condemned the Pharisees for:

1) **Not Practicing God's Law**. While the Pharisees were instructors of the law, they were not followers of the law. So, in fact, we see that Jesus condemned them for NOT adhering to the laws of God. ***"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you--but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice"*** (**Matthew 23:1-3**).

He condemned them for their sinfulness and hypocrisy - ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"*** (**Matthew 23:25-28**).

2) **Corrupting God's Law**. Jesus condemned them for changing God's law and adding their own. ***"And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'"*** (**Matthew 15:3-9**). Jesus condemned them for their lack of obedience to the law of God. They taught their own doctrines instead of teaching God's. They were wrong for doing so.

3) **Neglecting God's Law**. Jesus also condemned them for only keeping PART of the law instead of all of it. The following is a verse that needs to be understood correctly - ***"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness"*** (**Matthew 23:23a**). Here is where some might be tempted to stop and say *'See! Jesus told them to focus on justice, mercy, faithfulness and not on all that other law-keeping stuff.'* But that is not what Jesus was saying at all. That verse doesn't end there. Jesus went on to say ***"These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others"*** (**Matthew 23:23b**). Jesus told them that they SHOULD have done all of the tithing without neglecting the rest of the law. In other words, they were only doing the parts of the law that they wanted to do, and God expects man to obey ALL of His commandments.

In conclusion, we see that the Pharisees were NOT condemned by Jesus for being too concerned about obeying God's law, but in fact it was because they weren't concerned enough!

Today, when one teaches the commandments of God in the New Testament, they are not being 'Pharisaical,' they are being true to the Word of God. At the same time, the term 'Pharisaical' can rightly be applied to any and all who claim to be followers of Christ who are hypocritical in their service to God, teach other doctrines that are not in accordance with God's, and those who neglect parts of God's law.

To God be the glory!

***"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”*** (**John 14:15**)

***“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says "I know Him" but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”*** (**1 John 2:3-6**)