

# "A Critical Spirit," The Modern Church's Definition Of The Pharisee



The farthest thing from the Spirit of Jesus is the spirit of religion. Throughout the Bible, there are certain spiritual types and patterns available for our consideration. If we want a Biblical model for dead, Christ-rejecting religion, none so exemplifies this spirit more than the Jewish Pharisee. Nothing is more different from Jesus than a Pharisee. Not surprisingly, Jesus' harshest words and fiercest battles involved the Pharisees. The Pharisees not only resisted and rejected the message and person of Jesus Christ, they also plotted His betrayal and ultimately, His murder. Thus, to call someone a "Pharisee" is to essentially accuse them of being a Christ-hater and Christ-murderer. However, how might we truly define the Pharisee?

Unfortunately, in the professing church today, the beliefs that "obedience to God's commandments constitutes legalism" and a "zeal for Biblical accuracy equates to Phariseeism" are wide spread. These erroneous beliefs are consistent with the rank Antinomianism that has spiritually crippled and blinded the modern evangelical church. Sin abounds among professing Christians today and the light of God's Word is shunned and opposed. Consequently, "criticism," like perhaps nothing else, is considered the defining characteristic of a Pharisical spirit. Somehow, correcting, reproving, or exposing sin or doctrinal error with the Scriptures is now believed to be hateful, cruel, and self-righteous. Is this accurate? Is such a view Biblically sound? In finding our answer, we must remember that dead religion is the devil's counterfeit for Biblical Christianity. It is a sham, a fraud, a spiritual mirage, cleverly crafted to deceive the undiscerning. Jesus, when teaching on the difference between true and false spirituality, often used parables. Within those object lessons, he always cited things similar in appearance but different in nature. For example, "sheep" and "goat" have a resemblance, but they are two different creatures. To the

untrained eye, "wheat" and "tares" appear as the same plant, but they grow from different seed. Thus, a counterfeit is always exposed and debunked when compared to the genuine it imitates. To truly contrast two opposing parties and define their unique characteristics we must find the distinct areas in which they differ. We can never rightly determine a counterfeit 100 dollar bill from the genuine by merely concentrating on the obvious agreements (for example, the picture of Benjamin Franklin), we must rather, ascertain the subtle differences. Hence, to truly understand the Pharisees, we must compare them with Jesus and find how they differ. What individual and unique traits separate the character of Jesus from the character of the Pharisees? And more importantly, was "criticism" something unique to the Pharisees and foreign to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Notice, when we apply this rule of comparison and contrast to "criticism," we find it cannot be the distinguishing mark of a Pharisaical spirit. Why? Because Jesus was just as critical of the Pharisees as they were of Him. Jesus is characterized in the Gospels as being very forthright, often reproofing the Pharisees publicly. For example, in Matthew 23 alone, one ten minute sermon, Jesus referred to the Pharisees as hypocrites 7 times. Furthermore, He called them 12 other derogatory names ranging from "blind guides" to "serpents." And finally, he told them they were hell-bound. Therefore, we see that Jesus was brutally critical of the Pharisees. On the other hand, the Pharisees projected a very peaceful public image. They often met Him with proper titles and approached him with feigned respect. More times than not, they flattered Jesus, but their heart was filled with hatred, while they secretly plotted to do away with Him. Hence, the Pharisees were just as critical of Jesus, but more cloaked under religious hypocrisy. Jesus' disagreement with the Pharisees was well known, documented, and easily understood...

"The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said."

-John 18:19-21

While the Pharisee's disagreement with Jesus was more clandestine. They gave the appearance of peace, love and tranquility, yet they plotted His murder.

"Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry..."

-Luke 23:4-5

Hence, it is not merely "criticism" that distinguishes the Pharisee, but hypocritical "criticism of Jesus" (the Word) that defines this spirit. This is a subtle but profound difference in terms. It's not that we are critical, or judgmental, but rather, are our criticisms and judgments in agreement with, or opposed to God's Word? The Pharisee, therefore, will actually judge outside of God's Word and do so while he hypocritically and arrogantly condemns "judgment".



In fact, the words "criticism," "critical," or "critic" are nowhere found in the Bible (KJV). Moreover, contrary to popular opinion, Jesus is extremely critical..

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a DISCERNER of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

-Hebrews 4:12-13

The Greek word translated into the English word "discerner" is "krit-ee-kos." The word literally means to be decisive, critical, or discriminative. This suggests that Jesus Christ, who is the living Word of God, is critical [this fact is eluded to in verse 13 in the personification of the Word, i.e., "his sight"]. This idea refutes the modern, popular, and yet worldly philosophy which teaches that criticism is always wrong.

Thus, to the charge of Phariseeism I respond:

Am I judgmental?

Yes, boldly so, examining and proving all things according to God's Word.

Am I intolerant?

Absolutely, intolerant of anything and everything opposed to Jesus Christ.

Am I critical?

Of course I am. I am consumed, not possessed, with a critical Spirit, His name is the Holy Ghost.

Am I open-minded?

Never, I'm utterly given over to a narrow mind.

However, none of these declarations necessarily make me a Pharisee.

-B.W.