

The Mind of Christ

The Enemies of Jesus – Part 1

INTRODUCTION:

- I. When we read in the gospel accounts about the life of Jesus Christ, it's difficult to understand why there was so much hatred and hostility directed against Him.
 - A. It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to understand why anyone who lived a life of such love, kindness and compassion would have met with such vicious and savage opposition.
 1. However, opposition was quick to arise.
 - a. For example, as early as the **second chapter of Mark's** account, we find that some were already beginning to criticize Jesus, and were becoming suspicious of His actions.
 2. Now that Jesus was over halfway through His three-year earthly ministry, the opposition toward Him had grown to a feverish pitch.

- a. This growing opposition would eventually reach the point where those who were His enemies would stop at nothing until they saw this Man dead.
- B. But why? Why did Jesus incur this kind of hostility against Himself?
1. The answer to this question lies in an understanding of the four main religious and political groups that opposed Him. When we learn more about them, we will begin to see why they hated Him so.
 2. These four groups include:
 - a. The scribes and Pharisees as one group.
 - b. The Sadducees as another group.
 - c. The Herodians as another group.
 - d. And finally the priests, or Chief Priests as the fourth group.
 3. So, to begin trying to understand the opposition to Jesus, let's start by taking a closer look at this first group – the scribes and the Pharisees.

BODY:

- I. To understand the opposition of the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus, we need to go back into Jewish history – to the roots of the sect of the Pharisees.
 - A. During the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity – which was between seven hundred to five hundred years before Christ – many of the Jews who were captives in those foreign lands continued to group together to worship Jehovah – even though they could no longer worship in the temple or make sacrifices according to the Law of Moses.
 1. Because they knew the captivity was God’s way of punishing them for their unfaithfulness, many of these captive Jews became zealous in their desires to turn back to God and to keep the Law with absolute and uncompromising loyalty.
 2. When the Meds and the Persians conquered the Babylonian empire and became the rulers of that part of the world, things changed for the Jewish captives.
 - a. The Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their own homeland and rebuild their nation once again.
 - b. Although a large number of returning Jews remained indifferent toward the Lord, a small remnant were

determined to never allow a national disgrace like the captivity to happen again.

(1). Their zeal for the Lord and for keeping the Law began to intensify, and in time, the separation between themselves and their Jewish brethren who were less faithful began to widen.

C. But in the year 335 BC, Alexander the Great, the leader of the great Grecian empire, came to power and eventually conquered the Meds and the Persians.

1. Unlike many conquerors of the past, Alexander was a benevolent leader, and allowed conquered peoples to exercise a form of self-government.
2. And while the Jewish nation of Israel soon became a subject of the Grecian empire, the Jews were allowed to live and worship as they pleased.
3. But over time, the philosophies and the lifestyle of the Greeks, simply called “Hellenism,” began to make inroads into Jewish life.

- a. Many Jews were beginning to adopt the lifestyle of the Greeks as well as the teachings of the great Greek philosophers.
 - b. They learned the Greek language, and tried to blend these philosophical beliefs with their own beliefs about Jehovah and the Law of Moses – they were called “Hellenists”
 - c. Hellenism was seen as rank heresy on the part of those Jews who remembered the history of the former captivity and who were determined to maintain absolute loyalty to Jehovah and the Law of Moses.
 - c. These faithful Jews were appalled by their compromising Jewish brethren, and the rift between them widened even deeper.
4. But the real split came following the death of Alexander the Great, when his kingdom was divided between four warring generals.
 - a. The Jewish nation fell under the leadership of Seleucus, who ruled from 381 to 321 BC.

- b. However, in 175 BC, the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes became ruler, and forced pagan worship among the people of Israel and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem by erecting a statue of the Greek god Jupiter in the temple, and by sacrificing a pig on the alter of burnt offerings.
- c. This desecration of the temple prompted a Jewish revolt led by Judas Maccabeus, the son of Mattathias, a priest of noble rank in Jerusalem.
- d. Those who backed the revolt and supported the Maccabees called themselves “the Hasidaeans” – literally translated to mean “the pious ones.”
 - (1). They were the purist among the Jews of their day – bent on keeping the Law of Moses in all purity, and without compromise.
 - (2). This sect of the Jews still thrives today – they are the strict, orthodox sect known as Hasedic Jews
 - (3). During this time the rift between the Hasidaeans and the Hellenists widened even more.

5. Although the Jews gained independence for a brief time following the Maccabaeen revolt, Rome came to power and eventually extended its empire to include the Jewish nation of Israel.
 - a. By this time, the division between “the Hasidaeans” – “the pious ones” – and the Hellenists who held to many Grecian philosophies was deep and irreversible.
 - b. Those who held unquestioned loyalty to the Law of Moses and the Prophets eventually formed a religious sect and were called the “Pharisees” – meaning “the separate ones.”
 - c. The Hellenists – those who held to many of the philosophies of the Greeks – founded a separate sect known as the “Sadducees” – a Hebrew word meaning “the righteous ones.”
6. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had learned to tolerate one another, although there were deep philosophical and religious differences between them.

- a. The Pharisees became closely linked to the scribes who meticulously copied every Old Testament book over and over throughout the centuries.
 - (1). As a result, the scribes became experts in interpreting the Law and the Prophets, and were often called upon to make legal judgments regarding certain aspects of the Law – the ecclesiastical lawyers of their day.

- b. The sect of the Sadducees was primarily made up of the Jewish religious leaders – especially the family line of High Priests.
 - (1). By the time of Jesus, the High Priest and his family, and the Jewish priesthood in general, were not only morally corrupt, they were also among the politically powerful Sadducees.
 - (2). They were not only wealthy they were also willing to compromise their loyalty to God to maintain their prestige and political power.

(3). Because of their political influence, the Sadducees also comprised the largest portion of the Sanhedrin – the Supreme Court of the Jews.

D. So, for the Pharisees, their beginning was born out of a deep devotion to Jehovah and a patriotic spirit where they would literally lay down their lives to preserve the purity of the Law of Moses and the integrity of the Jewish nation.

1. But there's more we need to understand about the Pharisees.

II. The Pharisees were so intent on keeping the purity of the Law of Moses that they were constantly given to increasingly strict interpretations to the Law.

A. As we said earlier, the scribes, who meticulously copied manuscripts of the scriptures, were also experts on every aspect of the Law.

1. So when it came to a question of how the Law should be interpreted, the scribes were the ones who were consulted.

2. Both scribes and the Pharisees were educated men who eventually became teachers of the Law. They were often leading rabbis who were held in high esteem by the common

people and viewed as the final authority on the Law of Moses.

3. It was common for the scribes and other well-respected rabbis among the Pharisees, to get into very intense discussions and debates over the interpretation of various requirements under the Law of Moses.
4. The outcome of these debates became the official interpretation of the Law, and these official interpretations were taught from one generation to the next, until they became known as the traditions of the elders and were eventually viewed as equal to the Law of Moses itself.
5. These oral traditions, or the traditions of the elders, governed every area of Jewish life.
6. The common man, who didn't have the advantage of spending countless hours studying the traditions of the elders, could never keep all these traditions simply because he didn't have the TIME to learn all the countless rules and regulations developed by the scribes and Pharisees.

- a. But to the scribes and Pharisees that was no excuse – they judged a man’s faithfulness to God on whether or not he kept the traditions of the elders.
- B. When it comes to the clash between the Lord and the scribes and Pharisees, there were at least four reasons why these religious leaders became the enemies of Jesus.
1. First, Jesus clashed the scribes and Pharisees because He labeled the oral traditions – the traditions of the elders – as nothing more than *“the commandments of men.”*
 - a. By making this charge in **Matthew chapter 15** and **Mark chapter seven**, Jesus was in essence INVALIDATING and NULLIFYING the traditions of the elders – He was simply saying the traditions of the elders have no real authority whatsoever.
 - b. In fact, the LORD spoke of a similar problem in the days of Isaiah the prophet.
 - (1). **Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)** – *The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*

Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

- c. Jesus applied this passage from Isaiah to the scribes and Pharisees who had challenged the disciples of Jesus for NOT keeping the tradition of the elders.
 - (1). He said the scribes and Pharisees had nullified or invalidated the Law of God by their traditions.
 - (2). He said they were breaking the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions.

- d. On another occasion, in **Matthew 12:1-8**, the scribes and Pharisees criticized the disciples of the Lord for plucking heads of grain and eating them as they passed through a field on the Sabbath day.
 - (1). According to the way the scribes and Pharisees interpreted the Law concerning keeping the Sabbath day holy, they believed the disciples of Jesus had broken no fewer than four scribal laws.
 - (a). To pluck heads of grain was technically reaping on the Sabbath day.

- (b). To separate the husk from the grain was technically winnowing.
 - (c). To rub the grain between the palms of the hands was technically grinding.
 - (d). And the whole process was technically preparing food for use.
- (2). The Law of Moses NEVER called walking through a grain field and eating the heads of grain a violation of the Sabbath law – that was purely a scribal INTERPRETATION of the Law
- e. The countless rules and regulations of the scribes and Pharisees – the traditions of the elders – obscured the Law of Moses by creating a whole set of new laws devised by mere men.
 - f. And Jesus opposed those laws BECAUSE they were devised by men and NOT by God.
2. The second reason Jesus clashed with the scribes and Pharisees is summed up in one of the charges they made against the Lord – namely that Jesus was *“a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”* (cf. **Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34**)

- a. Remember that the word Pharisee means “the separate ones” – meaning they INTENTIONALLY separated themselves from ANYONE and EVERYONE whom THEY considered to be sinners.
- b. They despised ANYONE whom they considered a lawbreaker – ANYONE who didn’t keep the traditions of the elders, let alone the Law of Moses.
- c. A Pharisee would NEVER think of socializing with sinners, let alone go into their house. But Jesus did both.
- d. **Luke 15:1-2** – *Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."*
- e. Jesus went on to teach three parables about the love and forgiveness of God – the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.
- f. Jesus wanted the scribes and Pharisees to know that the VERY PURPOSE for Him coming into this world was to

“preach the gospel of the kingdom” THROUGH which He would “seek and save that which is lost.”

- g. Jesus ALSO wanted the scribes and Pharisees to know that GOD LOVES the sinner – NOT the sin, but the SINNER – and is waiting patiently for the sinner to come home.
3. Another clash between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees came when the Lord REPEATEDLY exposed them for their HYPOCRISY.
- a. **Luke 18:9** – *He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: -- it was the parable of the Pharisee and the sinner.*
 - b. **Matthew 23** – Time after time Jesus labeled the scribes and Pharisees as RANK HYPOCRITES.
 - (1). They OUTWARDLY pretended to be HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS while INWARDLY they THEMSELVES were sinners like everybody else.
4. But perhaps the MAIN clash between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees is because they believed they were the ONLY

ones who had the AUTHORITY and the RIGHT to teach the Law.

- a. **John 7:14-19** – *Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"*
- b. Later, the Pharisees and the chief priests sent the temple guard to arrest Jesus. But when they came back empty-handed, the guards were asked why they had not arrested Him as ordered.
- c. **John 7:46-49** – *The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" Then the Pharisees answered*

them, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

- d. The scribes and Pharisees and the other rulers of the Jews thought THEY were the only ones who KNEW and UNDERSTOOD the TRUTH. In fact, they slandered the COMMON people who believed in Jesus and said, *"this crowd that does not KNOW the law is accursed."*
- e. It was as if they were saying, "Just WHO does this Jesus think He is invading OUR territory. WE are the ones who know the Law, and WE'RE the ONLY ONES who have the right teach it!"

III. Is it any wonder that the scribes and Pharisees grew to HATE Jesus with a vengeance? Jesus opposed virtually EVERYTHING they held sacred, and He EXPOSED them before their fellow Jews for being nothing more than rank hypocrites.

- A. But why did the scribes and Pharisees grow to hate Jesus so much that they would plot to silence Him any way they could?

1. First, the scribes and the Pharisees believed that to allow this Jesus of Nazareth to go on would be to allow Him to pollute the minds and hearts of the people.
2. But worst of all, to allow Jesus to go on would cause the scribes and Pharisees to lose credibility in the eyes of the people – something they coveted dearly.
 - a. Jesus was teaching things contrary to what THEY had taught, and He was quickly winning the hearts, minds and affections of the common people.
 - b. The reason for this should be obvious.
 - (1). Jesus came preaching grace and mercy while the scribes and Pharisees were preaching compliance to endless rules and regulations of men.
 - (2). Jesus was showing the common man that they didn't need to keep those endless rabbinic rules and regulations – they didn't need to keep the stiff and unbending traditions of the elders.
 - (3). Jesus taught that they needed to simply keep the Law of God as it had been handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai.

3. Therefore, because Jesus was winning the hearts and minds of the people and waking them to the falsity of the scribes and Pharisees, these men were determined to silence Jesus any way they could.
 - a. At first they tried to silence Jesus by attempting to discredit Him in the eyes of those who heard Him.
 - (1). They made a number of false accusations against Him – everything from being a false teacher to being of the devil.
 - b. When that didn't work, they tried to silence Him with threats of violence.
 - c. When that failed, they became determined to put Him to death.
4. In the end, the scribes and Pharisees would join forces with the other groups who opposed Jesus – namely the Sadducees and the Chief Priests.
 - a. What one group could not accomplish on their own, they would all accomplish together.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Don't think for a moment that the spirit of Pharisaism died with the collapse of the Jewish nation in 70 AD.
 - A. Sadly, it's alive and well within the Lord's church today.
 1. There are those within the body of Christ today who are so steeped in tradition that they have lost sight of the true essence of worship.
 2. There are those within the body of Christ who OUTWARDLY appear holy and righteous, while INWARDLY they are sinners just like everyone else.
 - a. They can see YOUR sin, but they're blind to their OWN.
 3. There are also those in the Lord's church who believe they are the ONLY ones who possess the truth.
 - a. They give THEIR OWN interpretations to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and then judge others by THEIR OWN PERSONAL standards of right and wrong and by their OWN NARROW INTERPRETATIONS of what is truth.
 - B. While it's ABSOLUTELY necessary that we remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, we need to let the Scriptures speak for themselves and resist the urge to push our OWN narrow interpretation.

1. The Lord doesn't give us the right to do anything more than to simply SPEAK where the BIBLE speaks, and be SILENT where the BIBLE is silent.
- C. Let's all be zealous for the Lord, but at the same time, let's remember one important thing – we don't have the right to sit in judgment of one another.
1. **Romans 14:10-12** – *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.*
 2. Rather than sit in judgment of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and try to judge THEIR faithfulness to God and THEIR love for the Lord, let's prepare ourselves for the day when, *"we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."*
(Romans 14:10)
- II. Are you ready for that day – to stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

- A. If you've never given your life completely and totally to Jesus Christ, or if you did that once but are now living to please yourself rather than living to please the Lord, you're not ready for that day.
 - 1. That's why we plead with you to do whatever you need to do to get ready for that day at this very moment.
 - a. If you've never obeyed the gospel...
 - b. If for some reason you've allowed your heart to become turned away from the Lord...