

Exalting Jesus Christ

The Enemies of Jesus – Part 1 *"The Scribes and the Pharisees"*

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's difficult, if not almost impossible, to understand why anyone who lived a life of such love, kindness and compassion would meet with such vicious and savage opposition.
 1. However, opposition against Jesus rose quickly.
 - a. For example, as early as the second chapter of Mark we find some were already criticizing Jesus, and were becoming suspicious of His actions.
 2. Even halfway through His three-year earthly ministry, the opposition toward Jesus had grown to fever pitch.
 - a. This growing opposition would eventually reach the point where His enemies would stop at nothing until they saw the Lord dead.

- B. But why? Why did Jesus incur such 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.
 - 2. These four groups include:
 - a. The scribes and Pharisees.
 - b. The Sadducees.
 - c. The Herodians.
 - d. And finally the priests, and chief Priest.
- C. Therefore, as we continue our series entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ," we're going to pause briefly in our studies of the gospel of John to look at other gospel accounts to better understand the enemies of Jesus.
 - 1. As we do, let's begin by taking a closer look at the first group who openly opposed Jesus – the scribes and the Pharisees.

BODY:

- I. To understand why of the scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus we need to go back in time to understand a little about Jewish history.

- A. During the days of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires – approximately 700 to 500 years before Christ – the people of Israel suffered humiliating defeats.
 - 1. Thousands were taken captive and forced from their homeland, and the city of Jerusalem and its Temple were laid waste.
 - 2. Despite this terrible suffering the captive Jews living in foreign lands continued to worship Jehovah.
 - a. They believed this captivity was God's way of punishing them for their unfaithfulness – and they were right.
- B. Years later when the Meds and the Persians conquered Babylon, things changed for those captive Jew.
 - 1. Cyrus, the Persian king, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their nation once again.
 - a. Under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra the people rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and eventually rebuilt the temple.
 - 2. Although some of returning Jews were indifferent toward the Lord, a remnant were determined to never allow a national disgrace like the captivity to happen again.

- a. Their zeal for the Lord and for the Law began to intensify.
 - b. And in time the gulf between these zealots and their less faithful Jewish brethren began to widen.
- C. In 335 BC the armies of Alexander the Great conquered the Meads and the Persians.
1. Alexander was a benevolent leader and allowed conquered peoples to exercise a form of self-government.
 - a. Although the nation of Israel came under the control of the Grecian empire, the Jews were allowed to live and worship as they pleased.
 2. But these Jews faced another threat – the philosophies and the lifestyle of the Greeks began to make inroads into Jewish life.
 - a. Many began adopting the lifestyle and language of the Greeks.
 - b. Others tried to blend the teachings of the great Greek philosophers with their own traditional beliefs about Jehovah and the Law of Moses.
 - c. They were called "Hellenists" and were seen as rank heretics by their more conservative Jewish brethren.

- d. As a result, the rift between these two groups widened even deeper.
- D. Some two hundred years later Rome conquered the territories that once belonged to Alexander the Great, including the nation of Israel, called Palestine by the Romans.
1. By this time, the division between the conservative Jews who called themselves "the pious ones" and the Hellenists was deep and irreversible.
 2. Those who held unquestioned loyalty to the Law of Moses and the Prophets eventually became known as the "Pharisees" – meaning "the separate ones."
 3. The Hellenists, for the most part, eventually became known as the "Sadducees" – a Hebrew word meaning "the righteous ones."
- E. By the time Jesus came on the scene, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had learned to tolerate one another – although there were deep philosophical and religious differences between them.
1. The Pharisees became closely linked to the scribes who had meticulously copied every Old Testament book over and over throughout the centuries.

- a. As a result of their familiarity with the Scriptures, the scribes became experts in interpreting the Law and the Prophets.
- b. They were often called upon to render legal judgments regarding certain aspects of the Law, and were considered the ecclesiastical – or religious – lawyers of their day.

II. So, why did Jesus clash with the scribes and Pharisees?

- A. The problem was simply that these men loved their long-held traditions – the traditions of their forefathers – more than they loved the Law of God.
 1. Since the scribes and the Pharisees were highly educated men, they became teachers of the Law – they became the leading rabbis' of their day.
 - a. They were held in high esteem by the people who also considered them as the final authority on the Law of Moses.
 2. Unfortunately, the scribes and Pharisees didn't always agree on how the Law should be interpreted.

- a. They would often get into intense debates among themselves over how to properly interpret the Law.
 - b. The outcome of those debates eventually became the official interpretation of the Law.
 - c. These interpretations were passed down from one generation to the next, until they became known as the *"traditions of the elders."*
 - d. And, these traditional interpretations of the Law governed every area of Jewish life.
3. When Jesus came on the scene, the scribes and Pharisees had long been accustomed to judging a man's faithfulness to God based on whether he kept the traditions of the elders – despite the fact that these traditions were nothing more than the teachings and commandments of men.
- III. When it comes to the clash between the Lord and the scribes and Pharisees, there were at least four reasons why these men became the enemies of Jesus.

- A. First, Jesus clashed with the scribes and Pharisees because He labeled the *"traditions of the elders"* for what they really were – nothing more than *"the commandments of men."*
1. By making this charge in **Matthew chapter 15** and **Mark chapter seven**, Jesus invalidated and nullified the traditions of the elders.
 - a. He simply said the traditions of the elders have no real authority whatsoever – despite the fact that some of these traditions went back hundreds of years to the days of Isaiah the prophet.
 2. In fact, if you recall from our previous lesson, the Lord spoke about this problem in the days of Isaiah.
 - a. **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."*
 3. Jesus applied this passage to the scribes and Pharisees who were still teaching for doctrine that which is nothing more than the commandments of men.

- a. Jesus charged the scribes and Pharisees with nullifying or invalidating the Law of God by their traditions.
 - b. In fact, they would actually go so far as to break the commandments of God just to keep their traditions.
4. On another occasion, in **Matthew 12:1-8**, the scribes and Pharisees criticized the Lord's disciples for plucking heads of grain and eating them as they passed through a field on the Sabbath day.
- a. According to the *"traditions of the elders"* the Lord's disciples had broken no fewer than four scribal traditions.
 - (1). First, to pluck heads of grain was technically reaping on the Sabbath day.
 - (2). Also, to separate the husk from the grain was technically winnowing.
 - (3). Then, to rub the grain between the palms of the hands was technically grinding.
 - (4). Finally, the whole process was technically preparing food for use.
 - b. Of course, the Law of Moses never condemned any of these practices as a violation of the Sabbath law.

- c. But that's how the scribes and Pharisees traditionally interpreted the Law concerning doing no work on the Sabbath.
5. Therefore, Jesus became the enemy of the scribes and Pharisees because He opposed the *"traditions of the elders"* as being nothing more than the teachings and commandments of men, and not the teachings and commandments of God.
- B. The second reason Jesus clashed with the scribes and Pharisees is summed up in a charge they made against the Lord – namely that Jesus was *"a friend of tax collectors and sinners."* (**cf. Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34**)
1. Remember, the word Pharisee means "the separate ones" – meaning they intentionally separated themselves from anyone and everyone whom they considered to be sinners.
 2. Therefore, a Pharisee would never think of socializing with sinners, let alone go into their house. But Jesus did both:
 - a. **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."

3. In Luke 15, Jesus went on to teach three wonderful parables about the love and forgiveness of God – the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or prodigal son).
 4. Jesus wanted the scribes and Pharisees to know that the very purpose for His coming into this world was to *"preach the gospel of the kingdom"* and to *"seek and save that which is lost."*
 5. Jesus 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.
- C. Another clash between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees came when the Lord repeatedly exposed them for their hypocrisy.
1. **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.
 2. This is why Jesus repeatedly called the scribes and Pharisees rank hypocrites in **Matthew 23**.

- a. Outwardly they pretended to be holy and righteous while inwardly they were sinners like everybody else.
- D. But perhaps the main clash between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees was because they believed they were the only ones who had the authority and the right to teach the Law.
1. If you recall from a previous lesson: **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?"*
 2. Later, the Pharisees and the chief priests sent the temple guard to arrest Jesus.

3. But when they came back empty-handed, they were asked why they had not arrested Jesus.
 - a. **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."*
4. The scribes and Pharisees and the other rulers of the Jews thought they were the only ones who knew and understood the truth.
 - a. In fact, when people started to follow Jesus the religious leaders contemptuously said, *"this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."*
5. 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!"
6. Is it any wonder that the scribes and Pharisees grew to hate Jesus with a vengeance?

IV. Jesus opposed virtually everything the scribes and Pharisees held sacred, and He publicly exposed them for being nothing more than rank hypocrites.

A. But why did the scribes and Pharisees plot to put Jesus to death?

1. The scribes and Pharisees were beginning to lose credibility in the eyes of the people – something they coveted dearly.

a. Jesus 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.

- B. Therefore, because Jesus was winning the hearts and minds of the people and exposing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, they became determined to silence Jesus any way they could.
1. At first they tried to silence Jesus by attempting to discredit Him in the eyes of His followers.
 - a. The scribes and Pharisees falsely accused Jesus of everything – from being a false teacher, to being demon-possessed.
 2. When that didn't work, they tried to silence Him with threats of violence.
 3. When that failed, they put Jesus to death by joining 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. Like the scribes and Pharisees, 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. And like the scribes and Pharisees, 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. And also like the scribes and Pharisees, 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.
 - b. Then they turn around and then judge everyone else by their personal interpretations of right and wrong.
- 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.
 - 1. We need to resist the urge to force our own narrow interpretations of right and wrong on others.

- a. 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.
2. We must certainly 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.
 - a. **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.*
 - b. Rather than sit in judgment of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and judge their faithfulness to God and their love for the Lord, we should be more concerned about 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 turn away from the Lord...