

## Will you teach as a Sadducee or a Pharisee?

“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:6-8).

How can we approach youth in a sexually charged culture that has translated tolerance into acceptance of virtually every form of deviation except for pedophilia and necrophilia? How do we deal with that?

And I want to submit to you that the Church historically has tended to be either in one camp or another. And I want us to look for a few minutes here at Acts 23 and verse six where Paul says halfway through that verse: “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6).

And then in verse eight:

“For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8).

Who were the Sadducees? They were the wealthy ruling class. They were a minority, but they had the money and, therefore, they had the power. The high priestly family was of the Sadducee party. They didn’t believe in the kinds of things that are mentioned there: life after death, either a soul surviving death or the resurrection of the body. They did not believe in life after death. At least they were certainly agnostic about it. They didn’t believe in angels and spirits. They didn’t believe in demons. They didn’t believe in angels. There are other things they didn’t believe in. They took free will to such a degree that they didn’t believe in predestination at all. And they played fast and loose with Roman civilization, Roman culture, not unlike their predecessors who compromised with the Hellenists a hundred to two hundred years before.

Who were the Pharisees? The Pharisees believed the Bible is the Word of God. The Pharisees believed that the Bible was God’s inerrant and infallible Word. The Pharisees believed that morality was clearly defined in Scripture

and infallibly defined in Scripture. The Pharisees believed in angels. The Pharisees believed in demons. The Pharisees believed in predestination, not to the point of violating the will of the creature, but in a balanced way. They basically believed the biblical doctrine that we are free moral agents and make true and authentic choices, and yet somehow, mysteriously God has a plan that is being worked out.

That is what the Pharisees believed. The Pharisees believed that the soul survives death and the Pharisees looked forward to a resurrection of the body. In short, the Pharisees believed the way I believe. In short, the Pharisees believed the way that Saint Paul believed.

Notice he says here: “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6).

And let me submit to you that if it came down to raw beliefs, Jesus was a Pharisee. Let that sink in for a moment. If it comes down to raw beliefs, Jesus is a Pharisee. But that is where we stop and that is where I want to talk to you really forcefully.

Pharisees never win anyone to the Lord. Pharisees are concerned about their personal appearance of holiness. Pharisees are concerned about what other people think of them. They are concerned about how their children act lest their children’s behavior negatively reflects on them. Pharisees go to the synagogue. They memorize Scripture. They study Scripture. They talk about Scripture. They talk about God. They pray, and they pray out loud. But Pharisees have no true evangelistic zeal. No, they have religious zeal.

Jesus said of the Pharisees, “You encompass land and sea to make one convert,” Matthew 23, “and when you have made him a convert, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).

They were religious. They wanted to convert people to their religion, but they weren’t evangelistic, because evangelism is about winning hearts. And nobody ever won my heart to Jesus when I was growing up.

I am the descendant of five Baptist preachers, four Methodist preachers and one Presbyterian preacher. And my mother told me I was going to be a preacher. But in my three years of being in high school, when I was a drunk, much of that time I believed myself to be an Atheist, though at times I was afraid there might really be a God, and he was going to punish me badly.

No one cared for my soul. They loved me. My Mama loved me. My Daddy loved me. But I never understood the gospel, and no one won my heart.

In effect, I think that I grew up in a Pharisaical America. I think that the America of the ... of my childhood, the 40s, the 50s and the 60s, though on the surface appearing to be very Christian, was actually not very Christian at all. I remember Daddy, who was an officer in the church, coming home and talking to Mama. It would have been the early 1960s and he said, “Well, Janet. We made a decision tonight.”

“What’s that?”

He said, “If any of those trouble makers come to our church to attend we are going to ask them, ‘Why are you here?’ And if they say, ‘We are here to worship God,’ we are going to tell them, ‘You have got your own churches to worship in. Go there.’”

I thought, “Whoa, man!” Even as a kid, somehow or another, that just struck me as Pharisaical in the bad sense. For, you see, Pharisaism is always hypocritical. Pharisaism can see in black and white terms the speck in your eye, but it’s totally blind and oblivious to the two-by-four in its own.

I think that America was superficially much more Christian in the 40s, 50s and 60s – the early 60s—than it was in the late 60s and on into our time, but superficially so. It had a form of godliness, but it denied the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:15).

You see, our reaction when we look at the world is to become Pharisees. It is to say, “Oh, my gosh, look at what is going on! They are fornicating like rabbits! And men are kissing men and women are kissing women!”

I have a close friend on Facebook who has a picture of her and her wife open-mouth kissing in the background. Wow! But I love that friend. I would never “unfriend” her. But, see, our reaction, when we see two women open-mouth kissing is to react. And it is to react as Pharisees.

What I want to say to you is that there is a third way. It is not the way of the Pharisee. And it is not the way of the Sadducee. The way of the Pharisee is

to go to the Bible and say, “Look, man. The Word of God clearly teaches this is evil; this is wicked; this is an abomination to God. What in the world are you doing hanging out with people like that? What in the world are you doing being friends with people like that?”

Pharisaism is rooted in fear and a fortress mentality of being under siege, but it never impacts lives. It never impacts the culture.

Sadducism is not the solution. Sadducism is to say basically, anything goes. And I submit to you as you look at American churches, we tend to either fall into the Sadducee camp or the Pharisee camp. The Sadducees, who don't believe anything at all and that everything is fine. And the Pharisees, who are up in arms because “the barbarians are at the gate,” and we are all that is left of Christian civilization.

What is the other way? The other way is to win the heart. Did Jesus hang out with whores? Let me ask you? Did he hang out with whores? He did. He hung out with whores. Did he go to cocktail parties, the equivalent of a cocktail party? There was the accusation about Jesus, that he was a drunkard and a glutton, a friend of publicans (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34) -- those were the crooked tax collectors who shook people down for money, while being in cahoots with the tyrannical foreign power occupying the country—and with prostitutes: he was a friend of sinners, and we think, “Oh, friend of sinners,” that is great, because we sing a song about that: “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners.”

But you have got to understand that was an epithet of terrible opprobrium in Jesus' day, friend of sinners.

Would Jesus go into a gay bar? I have got to say I think he would, if his purpose in going into a gay bar was to reach out to a relative or a friend who was in there to say, “I love you.”

A friend of mine asked me, a member of our church, could her brother who is a transvestite come to our church? I said, “Sure.”

I met her brother. I saw him at his mother's funeral. When I first saw him, I thought, “Gosh, that sure is a big, manly looking woman,” at first, because he had beautiful hair, long blonde hair, was nicely dressed in high heels, a dress and purse, and I mean, elegantly attired. I would have thought if it had

been years ago he had gone to Gus Kaplan. And then I realized that he is this lady's brother.

Who is going to reach that man with the gospel? Am I going to let his lipstick, his eye makeup, his nicely coifed blonde hair, get in the way of him and the Cross? (I am not talking about participation in the Lord's Supper without repentance; I'm talking about sitting in worship, under the sound of the gospel.

Well, wait a minute. You are just saying to forget morality.

No, I am not.

Turn with me to John eight. What does Jesus say to the woman taken in adultery? Jesus said to her: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

He didn't just say, "Neither do I condemn you." Nor did he just say, "Go and sin no more." He said both. In other words, it is vital that real Christians hold to biblical morality, because it is God's own morality, but never to hold to it in an arrogant way, but to hold to biblical morality in a humble way and to hold to biblical morality in a way that says, you know, "The first thing about biblical morality is it is a schoolmaster to lead me to Christ" (Galatians 3:24). Biblical morality has taught me that I need a Savior, and I am going to heaven because of one reason, and one reason only, Jesus Christ and what he has done for me on the Cross, not because I am heterosexual and have kept my pants on with other people.

I am going to heaven because I came under conviction that I was a sinner. I realized I was without hope except for God's sovereign mercy, and I cast myself on God's mercy in Jesus Christ, and I believe that when Jesus died on the Cross, he died for sinners such as I, and that through his sinless life and bloody substitutionary death, I am right with God.

See, that is the message. So where am I going with this? I am going with this right here.

You are teachers. You are dealing with little lives. You have to hold out two great truths. You have to lift up a standard of biblical truth and biblical morality. And yet at the same time, you have to hold up that truth that God

loves us in spite of who we are, that none of us has ever lived up to that standard of biblical truth, and that we are beholden to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

You deal with children in the first grade and second grade that way, in kindergarten in childlike, simple ways. But as kids begin to hit adolescence, particularly in junior high school, it is particularly true. Never underestimate what is going on in their little lives. Most kids, I am convinced in modern America, even home school kids are sexually active.

You say, “I don’t believe that.”

Fine. It is a free country. Believe what you want to.

Even in Grace Christian School, if by sex...

Oh, I will tell you how it went one time. I was in a meeting with a man and a woman, and their pastor was present, and the man was fudging on what he had done, and I began to ask questions, because I knew that without the man confessing his sin, he would never be free, and the marriage would never be restored. So the man is wanting it to be left that he and this woman had kissed in the church parking lot. So I began to ask more probing questions.

At one point, the pastor—and it was in the pastor’s community, not mine. It was in another state—he said, “I think this is going too far.”

And I said, “You need to be quiet. I am in charge here.”

And then I said to the man, “Was their genital contact?”

Boy, that pastor turned red. That is a terrible question to ask. But I wanted to see a marriage saved. And so I repeated the question. “Was there genital contact?”

He hung his head and said, “Yes.”

Now, what happened was that marriage got healed. And it would have never been healed without that. He had been caught, but he had not come clean. I am not talking about going and dredging up the past that is long since

buried. I am talking about a current event where there was lying and deception to cover up a discovered sin.

If we define sexual acts in terms of genital contact, I am telling you, junior high, on a significant number of those kids—I didn't say a majority. I said a significant number of the kids you are teaching are sexually active. We are a sexually charged culture. And they don't think anything is wrong with it at a certain level. The music videos teach them that. National heroes teach them that. Movies teach them that. Their magazines teach them that. Their Facebook friends teach them that. And, "Hey, if you are attracted to somebody of the same sex, there is nothing wrong in engaging in sexual activity with that person. After all, that is just who God made them to be." That is the thinking.

Against that, we are going to face one of two solutions, to be the Sadducee, who just ignores everything, or the Pharisee, who says, "Wait a minute, this is what the Bible says."

But I am leaving you with a third way and that is to win the heart. And how do you win a heart? I will tell you there is only one way I know. It is on your knees. You have got to pray for these kids. God is putting them in your care. And you need to keep your mouth shut until you know it is God's time to address something.

I didn't say to keep your mouth shut, I said, "Until you know it is God's time." You have got to share things with love.

You know, you can speak the Word of God with the Devil's lips. Did you ever think about that? The Devil quoted Scripture (Matthew 4:6; Psalm 91:11-12).

Pharisaism is speaking the Word of God with the Devil's lips.

Oh, sisters and brothers, what a privilege is ours. We live in deeply troubling times. The economy of our country is broken beyond repair. Our President didn't break it. His predecessor broke it, but he had help along the way, and things sure haven't gotten better in the past four years. We are looking at national bankruptcy, and we are looking at the bankruptcy of families.

There is no political solution to our problems. I am convinced of that. There is no political solution. But you have an opportunity to make a difference, and that difference is to love boys and girls, even stinky 13, 14, 15 year-olds, to love them enough to pray for them and to ask God, the Holy Spirit to give you a sensitivity because this is a school where we encourage you to share your faith in Jesus Christ with your students.

But don't do it in the Sadducee party or the Pharisee party. Do it as a follower of Christ. Do it with great humility, with great grace, with great kindness and pray that the fish will come to you. Pray that the fish will jump in the boat and then lovingly and gently lead them to Christ.

Listen. Are you naive to the point that you think that there are no lesbian students or male homosexual students here? Are you naive enough to think that there are no daddies who have molested their little daughters or little sons here? There is a pandemic of child molestation in America. And sometimes it is daddies, and sometimes it is mamas, and most of the time it is stepparents, and a lot of times it is neighbors.

How many little bruised souls will walk into your classroom next week and how much of their behavior will be colored by these terribly traumatic, but deeply repressed experiences?

I just want you to love those kids. I want you to pray for them. And I want you to be open to speak God's healing, affirming, loving words that never deny the truth, but always want to speak that truth in love.

May we pray?

Lord, the America I grew up in was externally a very Christian place. We prayed in school. We memorized the Bible in school, in the public schools I grew up in. And yet America was a strangely contradictory world. In my first job in 1961, Lord, black people could not even use the bathroom at the gas station. There was a white woman, a white man, and a colored bathroom back in the garage. There were no black students in my school at all. There was my father and the other leaders of the First Presbyterian Church of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina deciding to stand at the door and to say to any black person who came to worship, "Go away from here." American was superficially very Christian. But as I look back, I think there were very few real Christians.



Yet today here we are in a nation that superficially has thrown off the yoke. And we feel a besieged remnant as Christians and yet, Lord, I believe there are more real Christians in America today than there were when I was growing up.

Would you grant to us, as a Christian school, to be Christ-like in all our dealings, to love little children, even as we detect the seduction to sexual immorality, their own hang-ups, their own experimentations? May we deal with them kindly and gently and mercifully, knowing that you love gay people and straight people. You love men that dress like men and women that dress like women, and transvestites, too. And, Lord, you extend your offer of the gospel to all people everywhere: “Come unto me,” you said, “all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Lord, we want you to touch the hearts of the children that go through this school, because we know it is so very likely that a person can be raised by Christian parents, attend a Christian church, attend a Christian school, and the gospel never penetrates the heart. May we aim at the heart, and may the Holy Spirit bless—that one day, we may all, at the feet of Jesus, discover that heaven is filled with a multitude that no one can number and that we see among those people children we have taught, children we have prayed for, children we have loved, children here and there, we have shared Jesus with.

For Jesus' sake,  
Amen.