

P R E F A C E I

Why a book on Pharisaism? • Why us? • And why now?

You might be wondering why the world needs another book, let alone one on the subject of Pharisaism. After all, someone might ask, didn't that sect die out in the second century? Not quite, really. It morphed. This book is about its new guise. And though we think it begs to be exposed, we've wrestled with that question ourselves given the perspective detailed in these pages. But this book has, in a sense, written itself. We are merely the stewards of it.

The questions noted above are but three of many that clamored for attention in our minds and are addressed in more detail in the following chapters. But for now, suffice it to say that we believe God Himself has given us this task. It began with a statement God made in the middle of my seminary training when He explicitly told me that attaching letters (*M.Div.*) to the end of my name would permanently alter my self-concept and personality and it was clear He did not mean in a good way. It would change the way I viewed myself and other people, the way I interacted with them and even my relationship with Him. Though I didn't fully understand the implications of all of that at the time, I did finally obey Him just twelve units from completing my Master's in Theological Studies through the California Graduate School of Theology. I dropped out.

I made the decision against the advice of everyone I knew: my parents, classmates, professors and even my closest friends. Nevertheless, I can say with absolute conviction that it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. And I believe it's the one reason I continue to hear God's heart on this issue without compromise or confusion. It's also the reason I have the freedom to speak out on this issue without fear of financial ruin or hypocrisy, knowing that my spiritual effectiveness, credibility and security do not rest on the possession of manmade credentials.

The fact that God called me to this decision in the early 1970s and has continued to fine-tune my understanding of His heart on this issue for nearly four decades is what qualifies me to write this book. I do not know what He will do with it, whether it will ever see the light of day, or whether it will bear much or little fruit. But in obedience I am speaking what I believe He has given me to speak. The rest is up to Him.

This one decision well over thirty years ago to obey God certainly does not mean that I have not since made mistakes in the pursuit of spiritual maturity. It does not mean I no longer struggle with ambition or pride in one form or another. And it does not mean I was not already far down the road of Pharisaism, at least in my own heart, when I finally turned around.

But I did turn around, and I am very happy about that. And though I've failed to turn around in a timely manner at other points or on other issues in my life, I have learned this lesson: disobedience is costly and God rarely repeats Himself. So I am resolved to continue preferring God's perspective and accepting His course-corrections for the rest of my days, no matter the cost. The opinions or expectations of men must not control our decisions or beliefs if we want to walk in the freedom God has for us.

As to why *now*, I can only appeal to God on the timing. Personally, I am unsatisfied with "Churchianity," where we have long labored under a heavy blanket of religious rituals and practices. Paul made it clear that manmade traditions, doctrines and practices would infiltrate God's Church from its earliest moments, so our experience is no surprise. It is ubiquitous in the churches. We hope here to somehow lift the dark mantle that envelops us all (and which many of us have pulled over our own heads) and shed some light on God's true intentions for His Church, as we understand them.

Please approach this material with an open and uncluttered mind, as if you were reading the story of Jesus for the first time. If you are a religious professional, you will likely experience a massive internal conflict of interest, as the premise of this book is a challenge to your career. All the years (and money) you've invested in amassing credentials for your office will come clamoring for justification.

Whether you are able in the end to accept what we say as true or not, please postpone judgment until you finish reading the book.

If you make it to the end, one of two things will happen: you will either come away with fresh confirmation as to your own decisions, convictions and course, or you will find your life and ministry transformed in the most soul-stirring sense. We pray the latter will be the case for at least some of our readers.

God bless your efforts as He has ours.

T.L.